

MINISTRY REVITALIZATION THROUGH CULTURAL INCLUSION

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project was to study an immigrant Pentecostal congregation which has retained a foreign identity for almost 40 years of existence while located in the urban setting of New York City. This study helped to prove that being Pentecostal in theology requires that gospel must transcend cultural barriers. It is this willingness to embrace other cultures that the work of the Spirit can surpass human racial, cultural, national and gender classification. Unless a congregation is willing to embrace diversity it runs the risk of losing its Ecclesiastical credibility.

The study also explored the challenges and responsibilities of a minority congregation in a denomination which has always maintained a history of predominantly Caucasian leadership. As a Black congregation, in a white-led denomination, there is a mutual responsibility to pursue and embrace diversity. This study gives an insight in leading a congregation through the process of becoming multi-cultural.

As a congregation that has maintained a strong outreach to first generation Jamaican immigrants, this study explored the danger of how failure to engage the urban context ultimately could lead to disconnect of future generations. A ministry that is insulated from its surroundings context dooms itself to an early death.

The Church of God of East Flatbush (COGEF) was interested in developing information on its congregation's views on COGEF's acceptance and affirmation of individuals of different races and cultures and the congregants' understanding of stereotypes and discrimination. To address these questions, a pre and post questionnaire was designed to survey the congregation,

and educate them on discrimination. The analysis was conducted against a total of 200 randomly selected questionnaires. An independent research company conducted the analysis of the raw data. Other qualitative research tools were also used during the course of the study.

**This project is dedicated to the memory of my father,
Rev. Vernon N. Nelson, who taught me the power of
leadership and mentoring. He encouraged me to face
the challenge of moving beyond the security of my
ethnicity and to function cross-culturally.**

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to explore the impact of the Jamaican identity on the Church of God of East Flatbush (COGEF) and its responsiveness, or lack of it, to the other nationalities represented in the congregation and Brooklyn, New York at large. The Church of God of East Flatbush has experienced steady growth among first generation Jamaican immigrants. As a result, almost forty years later it remains a Jamaican oasis of spirituality and culture in terms of its ministry model and praxis. With a reduction in immigration from the Caribbean and with over 95% of the church's activity being self-directed, the membership eventually leveled off and began to decline. The relationship between the congregation and the community grew less and less and ultimately disengagement emerged. In functioning as a first-generation congregation, Church of God of East Flatbush has tenaciously held unto certain Jamaican traditions which have also created cultural distance with its American-born youths. As the pioneers of this ministry approach and enter retirement, there is urgency in addressing the issue of cultural engagement as we seek to cultivate a culturally inclusive environment in order to initiate revitalization in this ministry.

This demonstration project has explored the impact of the Church of God of East Flatbush's history, its Pentecostal heritage and its affiliation with the Church of God

Cleveland, Tennessee. It was the intention of the researcher to examine the historical framework of the Church of God of East Flatbush, its Pentecostal heritage, and the sociological impact of having a Jamaican identity while existing in New York City. It is the contention of the researcher that the theology of a spiritual institution should have a greater impact on its functioning rather than its ethnicity. Therefore, the Pentecostal heritage of The Church of God of East Flatbush mandates a context that is culturally inclusive.

Challenge Statement

The Church of God of East Flatbush was established in 1970 by Jamaican immigrants who struggled with the absence of a familiar place of worship and a feeling of disconnectedness. The congregation has experienced steady growth among first generation immigrants. As a result, it remains an oasis of spirituality and culture in terms of ministry model and praxis. It is my intention to lead and be led by the congregation in a process of studying the challenges and opportunities for urban ministry and to develop a model which provides room for other cultures within our community.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative design research was chosen for this study.

Description of Terms

- *Urban Ministry*

Urban Ministry is a ministry model which is designed to address the spiritual, social, physical and emotional needs of all people of the city regardless of their ethnicity or culture. This approach seeks to demonstrate the love of Christ by equipping and empowering those who live on the margins of society. Rather than embracing the status quo and existing as a self-contained community of faith, Urban Ministry reaches beyond itself and serves the poor and marginalized. Urban Ministry embraces the passage in Matthew 25:35-36 in a holistic way that extends soul care to include a concern for the naked, the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned.

- *Multicultural Ministry*

Multicultural Ministry is a ministry model which affirms and embraces a culturally inclusive community of faith. This model of ministry creates room for varied cultures to learn from each other and celebrate the cultural diversity in the body of Christ. This approach sees racism and discrimination as byproducts of a fallen humanity and therefore Multicultural Ministry provides an affirmation of all races and seeks to practice equality of all mankind. A Multicultural Ministry fosters respect and the opportunity for diverse cultures to learn from each other.

- *Pentecostalism*

Pentecostalism is defined as a movement within Christianity which embraces the belief in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers and this experience is the bestowal of spiritual power for service and the ability to live a holy life.

- *Focus Group*

This method offers face to face encounters with informants. It provides the opportunity to obtain large amounts of expansive and contextual data quickly. It facilitates co-operations from the research subject and access for the immediate follow-up data collection for clarification and omissions. It is good for obtaining data on non-verbal behavior and communication and facilitates discovery of nuances in culture. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), the researcher must get close to the people he studies. He understands that their actions are best comprehended when observed on the spot. The researcher himself must be at the location, not only to watch, but also to listen to the symbolic sounds that characterizes this world.

- *Fish Bowl*

Fishbowl is a strategy used not only in classrooms but also in business meetings and other settings where group dynamics are important. This technique allows for a richer discussion of any given topic and it frequently helps build community by focusing attention on the ways that particular group might work together more productively.

Setting

The Church of God of East Flatbush (COGEF) was established in the late 60s by a small group of Jamaican immigrants in Brooklyn, New York, who wanted to continue their tradition of worshipping in the Church of God denomination while retaining the cultural practices transplanted from their homeland. These immigrants migrated to New York City, and in so doing experienced a deep sense of loss and isolation from their spiritual and cultural roots. The birth of the Church of God of East Flatbush helped to

alleviate acculturation stress and culture shock by providing a sense of familiarity reminiscent of their country of origin. The independent spirit and leadership required to survive persecution suffered by the Church of God branches in Jamaica became an asset to this small group of immigrants who dreamt of having their own church.

The COGEF has had four pastors and is presently led by a pastoral team headed by Bishop R. C. Hugh Nelson and four associate pastors. The church leadership expands to include twelve deacons, six trustees, six ministers, thirty-one chaplains and over one hundred ministry team leaders. The church has over twelve hundred members and serves over twenty-five hundred people on a weekly basis through its worship services and community programs. The congregation's core membership has remained consistent, evidenced by a tradition of maintaining membership through three or four generations. As a testament to membership loyalty, children who attended the church thirty years ago are now actively involved in ministry leadership roles.

The Church of God of East Flatbush presently provides three worship services each Sunday, weekly Bible Study and various youth and community programs. A subsidiary of the Church is Gayle Academy for Children, Inc. which has been in existence for thirteen years and services nursery to Grade 1. The church established and incorporated the Hope Center Development Corporation which presently serves over twenty-five hundred people per month through its food and clothing distribution, tutoring, GED, computer literacy class, financial empowerment, crisis intervention counseling, prison outreach, Angel Tree, Senior Drop-in Center, job preparation, income tax assistance, resource referral and the Family Restoration Program which matches mentors with previously incarcerated persons.

Participants

Participants in the study consisted of five site team members and ten focus group members. The participants were selected based on a purposeful congregational sample. The participants in the focus group and fishbowls were chosen because of their diverse nationalities and stated interest in the study. The fishbowls had between 8 and 10 participants from the different nationalities represented in the church. The first two fishbowls had participants who were able to share their journey with the congregation and the challenges they faced in attempting to assimilate into the church. During the second fishbowl, an empty chair was added and members of the congregation were invited to participate in the dialogue. Several individuals accepted and shared their experiences as they each sat at the allocated chair. The third and fourth fishbowls were reserved for the youth and men respectively in order to get their perspective on the journey of assimilation into COGEF.

During the study, the researcher and three guest presenters made presentations to the congregation. They were Yoon Jo Lee, Ed.D.—cross-cultural training, Grace Cornish, Ph.D.—Five Love Language Diversity Training and Andria Smith, Ph.D.—History of Pentecostalism and Church of God.

CHAPTER 2

History of Pentecostalism

Introduction

“The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in all their multifaceted variety constitute the fastest growing group of churches within Christianity today”.¹ As a movement it represents a vast range of denominations and independent churches which embrace a variety of theological beliefs. Pentecostalism could be defined as a movement within Christianity which embraces the belief in the operation of the Holy Spirit in believers and this experience bestows spiritual power for service and the ability to live a holy life. Pentecostals are passionate in their belief that the Holy Spirit’s manifestations of healing, miracles, prophecy, exercising of spiritual gifts and Spirit baptism in the first century Christian church should be desired and experienced in contemporary times.

While Pentecostalism is often described or generally known as a movement rather than a denomination, this movement is not restricted to a single stream. Within the movement itself are several divergent currents, but the unifying tide is the belief in the experience known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is a post-conversion experience which empowers the believer to be effective in ministry and lifestyle. Most Pentecostals in the United States adhere to the belief that the initial evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism is to speak in unknown tongues. According to Anderson (2004),

¹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

Classical Pentecostals cannot be universally classified on the basis of the 'initial evidence' teaching, which is not in the official doctrines of some of the oldest Pentecostal denominations in Europe and South America, and even where it is, classical Pentecostals are by no means unanimous about its interpretation.²

Some scholars ascribe the rapid global expansion of Pentecostalism to its ability to incarnate the gospel in different cultural forms. The global statistics on Pentecostalism is apt to generate debate as to exactly how many believers self identify as Pentecostal and some accuse Pentecostals of an inordinate preoccupation with numbers as a symbol of prominence. For example, Walter Hollenweger, a renowned researcher in Pentecostalism, classified the Pentecostal movement in three distinct forms. 1) The Classical Pentecostal, 2) The Charismatic Renewal Movement within traditional churches and 3) Pentecostal or Pentecostal-like independent churches in the majority World.³

The Classical Pentecostals emerged out of the Holiness movement and was defined in terms of its emphasis on tongues as the initial evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism. This category includes the established Pentecostal denominations which are committed to a Pentecostal theology. Cheryl Bridges Johns in her book, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among The Oppressed* (1993), notes, "These denominations have become quite institutionalized with streamlined bureaucratic systems, well defined creeds and movement towards conceptual theology which is acceptable in Evangelical circles."⁴ She further described the Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostals as those who accepted some of the elements of traditional Pentecostal liturgy and belief but who remained in the confines of the mainlined churches.

² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

³ Ibid, 13.

⁴ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, England, 1993). 63.

While Pentecostalism at first seemed to flourish primarily among the poor, the Charismatic revival of the 1960s shattered this narrow stereotype when Pentecost touched the ranks of Catholic intellectuals, Episcopalian parishes and American business people. The Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal revival was preceded by the rise of many Pentecostals into the middle class during the years following World War II with the aid of technological advances. Pentecostal leaders such as Oral Roberts introduced Pentecostalism to many American families via the medium of radio and television. Groups such as the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship, which brought the Pentecostal message to American businessmen, also helped to further Pentecostalism among the middle class. David DuPlessis is credited for helping to spread the Pentecostal experience among non-Pentecostals not only in the USA but around the world, especially among 'liberal' churches and member churches of the World Council. "DuPlessis was general secretary of the AFM [Apostolic Faith Mission] in South Africa from 1936 until 1947 when he moved to Switzerland to help organize the first Pentecostal World Conference."⁵

Johns (1993) notes that "The indigenous (non-missionary) Pentecostal churches of the Third World represent the most vital and fastest growing segment of the movement."⁶ The indigenous Pentecostal churches have experienced numerical as well as economic and political expansion. They represent the most significant growth in regions such as Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean.

⁵ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146.

⁶ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). 64.

Modern Pentecostalism Movement

The modern Pentecostal Movement in some way was the offspring of the Wesleyan Revivals of the 1800s. While the Movement blossomed in the United States its theological roots wound its way back into the early British Charismatic movements. According to Vinson Synan in the article, “The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement” (2007),

Although the Pentecostal movement had its beginnings in the United States, it owed much of its basic theology to earlier British perfectionistic and charismatic movements. At least three of these, the Methodist/Holiness movement, the Catholic Apostolic movement of Edward Irving, and the British Keswick "Higher Life" movement prepared the way for what appeared to be a spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in America.⁷

It was from John Wesley’s doctrine that Pentecostals accepted the notion of a subsequent crisis experience referred as entire sanctification. The higher life spirituality provided the foundation for a Pentecostal understanding of pneumatology and pre-millennialism. This concept proposed that believers should mature through various stages of spiritual growth towards a dimension whereby self-will was totally surrendered and the believer baptized by the Holy Spirit. Many adherents of this teaching advocated a progressive historiography which proposed that God acted at various times in history to restore certain truths which were lost or overshadowed in previous generations. Joe Creech, in “Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History” (1996), provides a keen overview on the subject and eloquently described this concept in his

⁷ Vinson Synan, *Holy Spirit Research Center: The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement*, www.oru.edu/university/library/holyspirit/pentorg1.html, 1 (Accessed August 2007), 1.

doctorial thesis. He stated, “This ‘progressive’ restorationist historiography provided the rationale for adopting doctrinal innovations such as pre-millennialism and tongues.”⁸

Pre-millennialism became entrenched in the evangelical sector of American society around the start of the twentieth century. It falls into two classifications: historic and dispensational pre-millennialism. Historic pre-millennialism discarded the notion of a pre-tribulation rapture and the uniquely Jewish nature of the dispensationalist's millennial kingdom. Dispensational pre-millennialism was developed by John Nelson Darby and purports a theological interpretation that views biblical history in terms of successive epochs of divine governance. It supports a divine distinction between God's designs for Israel and the Church as well as emphasizes end-time prophecy and a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church prior to Christ's second coming. The concept of a pre-tribulation rapture emerged first out of a dispensational pre-millennial worldview.⁹

It was believed that God was perfecting a holy remnant that would escape his impending wrath with the advent of the rapture and that the world and organized religion were under his condemnation. Early Pentecostals believed that just prior to the rapture God would initiate a worldwide revival in fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the “former and latter rain of the Holy Spirit” in Joel chapter 2, Zechariah chapter 10 and Acts chapter 2. These passages were interpreted to mean that God initiated the Church Dispensation with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the former rain) that empowered the disciples to spread the gospel in Acts 1:8 and that just before the return of Christ, God would initiate a similar outpouring (the latter rain).

⁸ Joe Creech, “Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History” *Church History* 65, No. 3.(Sep., 1996), 419.

⁹ <http://www.theopedia.com>.

These classical Pentecostal leaders viewed the Pentecostal movement as reversing the spiritual decadence of the church while ushering in a new era of spiritual fervor. They understood the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a signal of the advent of the last days. They embraced a pre-millennial and dispensational view of eschatology which fueled the urgency for their evangelism. Eschatology is defined in Miriam-Webster Dictionary as a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind.¹⁰ This eschatological hope dominated the Pentecostal movement in its formative stage and the linking of the “full gospel” with the “last days” was the paradigm shift that set the Pentecostal movement apart from the Holiness movement out of which it emerged.

Origins of the Modern Pentecostal Movement

One of the key figures in the modern Pentecostal movement, according to Allen Anderson (2004), in *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, was Charles Fox Parham, a former Methodist pastor. Due to his theological impact on the movement, he was referred to, by some, as the father of Pentecostalism. He resigned from the Methodist Church in 1895 and after experiencing healing from the consequences of rheumatic fever in 1898, he began his healing ministry.¹¹ He settled in Topeka, Kansas where he opened his healing home and began publishing “The Apostolic Faith” magazine, in which he advocated divine healing, pre-millennialism and a third blessing subsequent to

¹⁰ Dictionary.com. Merriam-Webster’s Medical dictionary. Merriam-Webster,inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/culture>. (Access February 18, 2008).

¹¹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

sanctification.¹² After attending six weeks of Sanford's lectures on Anglo-Israelism and the notion of foreign tongues being given by the spirit for world evangelization, he returned to Topeka to establish the Bethel Gospel School. He enrolled thirty-four students to be trained in his Bible institute with the Bible as the only text book. He challenged his students to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and impressed on them that tongues was God's witness to the genuine baptism. They designated December 31, 1900 to be a special watch-night service where after much prayer and fasting they sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Anderson further notes that on January 1, 1901 a young Bible School student by the name of Agnus Ozman was baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. This event launched Parham into great prominence and many were baptized in the Spirit accompanied with tongues in subsequent revivals. Parham began meetings in Houston, Texas where he led a three-month Bible School. It was here that destiny would bring William Joseph Seymour into contact with Parham and where he would be taught the doctrine of "evidential tongues". Parham's teachings on evidential tongues would eventually become the bedrock of Classical Pentecostals, but he went further to advocate that tongues were the supernatural impartation of human languages (xenoglossolalia) for the purpose of world evangelization. This motivated Parham to discourage the formal study of foreign languages for the sake of world evangelization on the premise that some people were gifted by the Spirit with the miraculous ability to communicate to a foreign audience in their language without training to aid the task of evangelization.

Parham's place in Pentecostal history was chiefly centered on the theory of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues and his interpretation

¹² Ibid. 33.

that the restoration of tongues was a key indicator of God's plan to initiate the worldwide revival that would replicate the first Pentecost and precede Christ's second coming. With time, his role became greatly diminished within the Pentecostal world and the movement rapidly outgrew him, embracing his former student William Seymour as the pivotal Pentecostal leader. He made a failed attempt to gain control of Zion City, a ministry established as a theocracy by John Alexander Dowie which promoted a classless society that was committed to racial and gender equality. Anderson further stated, at its peak, Zion City had about eight thousand members and over 200,000 members worldwide. "In 1905 Zion City went bankrupt Dowie suffered a stroke and died in disgrace less than two years later."¹³

Parham also made a failed attempt in October 1906 to take control of the Azusa Street Mission, the thriving Pentecostal ministry in Los Angeles led by William Seymour.¹⁴ He was particularly appalled by the interracial fellowship and what he termed hypnotism and the freak imitation of Pentecostalism. "He later wrote that the worship at Azusa Street was a cross between the old-fashioned Negro worship of the South and Holy Rollerism."¹⁵ Some believe that because of Parham's racist sentiments and his criticism of Seymour, he was rejected by the Azusa Street mission and was never reconciled with Seymour. After attending a few services where he sharply criticized Seymour and the Azusa Mission, he was asked to leave and he started a rival mission close by with some of Seymour's devoted followers. Parham was later arrested and charged with homosexuality in 1907 and although the case was eventually dropped, his

¹³ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32.

¹⁴ Ibid, 35.

¹⁵ Larry E. Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and the History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Pensacola, Florida: Christian Life Books, 1999), 269.

ministry was irreparably injured by the scandal.¹⁶ He remained on the fringes of the movement for the rest of his life and continued to attack his former Pentecostal colleagues on rejecting his doctrine on tongues being given for world evangelization and the high emotionalism and inter-racial mingling in some Pentecostal circles.

The Impact of Azusa Street on Pentecostalism

The modern Pentecostal movement was started by Charles Parham, but became a world-wide phenomenon under the leadership of his African-American student William Joseph Seymour. Due to the prominent role played by the Azusa Street Mission in stirring the Pentecostal flame worldwide, most Pentecostal denominations associate their beginning with the Azusa Street phenomenon.

For the next three years the revival in Azusa Street was the most prominent center of Pentecostalism, further promoted by Seymour's periodical, *The Apostolic Faith*, which reached an international circulation of 50,000 at its peak in 1908. People affected by the revival started several new Pentecostal centers in the Los Angeles area, so that by 1912 there were at least twelve in the city.¹⁷

William J. Seymour, pastor of the Azusa Street Mission, was raised in the Baptist tradition and like many of his Pentecostal contemporaries had become Pentecostal after being exposed to the Holiness movement. Seymour came into contact with Holiness teachings when he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1900. It was there that he joined the Reformation Church of God, also known as the Evening Light saints. These believers were persuaded that they were living in the last days and the outpouring of the Spirit would precede the rapture of the Church. It was here that Seymour became immersed in a

¹⁶ Allan Anderson, 35.

¹⁷ Ibid. 40.

radical Holiness theology, which taught sanctification as a post-conversion experience resulting in the believer experiencing complete holiness.

Cox reports in his book, *Fire From Heaven* (1995), Seymour moved to Houston, Texas where he joined an African-American Holiness congregation led by an African-American woman by the name of Lucy F. Farrow. She introduced William Seymour to the renowned Holiness preacher and arranged for him to attend Parham's Bible classes. Due to the "Jim Crow" segregation laws active at the time, Seymour had to listen to Parham's lectures while sitting outside the classroom in the hallway. It was here that Seymour was introduced to Parham's view of baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by the evidence of tongues and the belief that tongues would be intelligible languages to believers for missions. Cox further stated, in 1905, Neeley Terry, an Africa-American who attended a small congregation in Los Angeles, heard Seymour preach while on a visit to Houston and recommended him to the congregation which was seeking a pastor.¹⁸ Seymour accepted the invitation to pastor the small congregation and arrived in Los Angeles in February 1906. When Seymour began preaching that tongues was the evidence for Spirit baptism, the congregation locked him out of the building. Nevertheless, some of the members of the church soon joined him in prayer meetings. Anderson states, "At the house where Seymour was staying, his host Edward Lee, asked the preacher to lay hands on him after which he fell to the floor as if unconscious and began speaking in tongues."¹⁹ For several days large crowds gathered for prayer and to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and soon they moved into an old building at 312 Azusa Street with sawdust sprinkled floor and rough planks for benches. The daily

¹⁸ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Express, 1995), 50.

¹⁹ Allan Anderson, 39.

meetings would begin about 10 a.m. in the morning and lasted until after 10 in the night. As news of the revival spread with testimonies of healings and saints being baptized with the Holy Spirit, many white and ethnic Pentecostal believers were drawn to the meetings. “For over three years, the Azusa Street ‘Apostolic Faith Mission’ conducted three services a day, seven days a week, where thousands of seekers received the tongues baptism.”²⁰ Many visitors from around the world visited Azusa Street and brought back with them the Pentecostal message which in turn sparked further revivals in their homeland. Some students of Pentecostalism suggest that within two years of the Azusa Street revival, Pentecostal missionaries had carried the gospel to over 25 nations. The movement grew rapidly and “within two and one half years Pentecost had been established in 50 countries.”²¹

The Azusa revival received free publicity from the hostile local media which took exception to the emotional and racially inclusive phenomena demonstrated at the mission. The Azusa Street mission indeed manifested the combination of American holiness spirituality with the passionate worship style of the African American Christian tradition. The worship style at Azusa Street was marked by a spontaneous emotionally expressive experience which emphasized and celebrated the presence of God in the worship services. The Azusa Street Mission demonstrated an interracial ethos which presented a sharp contrast to the racial segregation of the times. The phenomenon of Blacks and whites, educated and un-educated, rich and poor worshipping together under the leadership of a Black pastor and governed by a system of equality was an affront to the

²⁰ Vinson Synan, *Holy Spirit Research Center: The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement* (www.oru.edu/university/library/holyspirit/pentorg1.html), 5 (Accessed August, 2007).

²¹ Larry E. Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and the History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Pensacola, Florida: Christian Life Books, 1999), 237.

status quo. The racial integration practiced at these meetings was unique at the time and ethnic minorities were able to discover an ethos of community life which gave them the dignity denied them in the larger society. Martin (1999) in his book, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and the History of the Azusa Street Revival* cites a quote by Frank Barthleman, a white leader at the mission, who stated “the color line was washed away in the blood.”²² Proclaiming an eschatological message coupled with an unusual demonstration of racial inclusion, the Azusa Street Mission became a trailblazer for world Pentecostalism. It appealed especially to those on the margins of society, displaced and disillusioned by poverty and racial discrimination and like the New Testament church described in the Book of Acts, this inclusive congregation modeled an alternative social arrangement which rejected the racial segregation of American society.

Under Seymour’s leadership the Azusa Street Mission, at least for a while, lived out its philosophical principles by successfully prevailing over the racial, gender and class barriers. The leadership team was fully integrated with more than half being women. Several failed attempts to take over the leadership of the mission resulted in splits and the establishment of rival congregations. In 1908, two of Seymour’s workers, Clara Lum and Florence Crawford, left Azusa Street with the mailing list of the Apostolic Faith in objection to Seymour’s marriage to Jenny Moore. Crawford established an Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon.²³

In 1911, William Durham, a Chicago preacher who had received the Spirit baptism at Azusa Street, came to Los Angeles and tried to take over the mission while Seymour was away on a preaching trip. When Seymour returned, Durham’s plan was

²² Larry E. Martin., 197.

²³ Ibid. 278-9.

aborted and Glen Cook, Seymour's business manager, left with Durham to establish a rival congregation nearby.²⁴ There is no doubt that the varied efforts to redefine or to compete for the leadership of the mission helped to erode the stability and morale of this once thriving ministry. Anderson aptly notes the gradual decline of the congregation. On May 19, 1914 a business meeting was held amending the incorporation to rule that the leadership of the mission was to remain with a person of color.²⁵ During the earlier years of the Azusa Street Mission, the gift of tongues was emphasized as the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Facing the harsh reality that racism continued to play a part in undermining the stability and credibility of the mission Seymour was forced to content with the disappointment of watching former colleagues disassociate from the mission and some who attempted to undermine his leadership. Not because of the difference in theology but because of the awkwardness of a black pastor leading a racially inclusive ministry. Some of the white believers had to contend with the scorn of their white associates who criticized them for the fact that they embraced Blacks as equals. Cox captures the sentiment of Seymour's journey when he was compelled to shift the genuine evidence of the baptism in the Spirit from merely tongues to racial embrace. He states, "Finding that some people could speak in tongues and continue to abhor their Black fellow Christians convinced him [Seymour] that it was not 'tongue speaking' but the dissolution of racial barriers that was the surest sign of the Spirit's Pentecostal presence and the approaching New Jerusalem."²⁶ While Seymour was saddened by the

²⁴ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

²⁵ Larry E. Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and the History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Pensacola, Florida: Christian Life Books, 1999), 325.

²⁶ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Express, 1995), 63.

fragmentation of the movement and made every effort to promote reconciliation, he maintained the testimony of remaining free of bitterness. Cox eloquently captured the essence of the paradox of Pentecostal expansion when he stated, “The more the Pentecostals fought the more they multiplied.”²⁷

The Three Major Pentecostal Categories

Jacobsen reports in his book, *Thinking in the Spirit* (2003), a series of conflicts developed within the Pentecostal movement between 1910 and 1918 that evolved into three separate theological streams within the movement: Holiness Pentecostalism, Finished-Work Pentecostalism and Jesus-Only Pentecostalism. The Holiness Pentecostalism stressed the need for three separate and distinct spiritual experiences. The Finished-Work Pentecostalism argued for two distinct experiences in the salvation journey and the Jesus-Only Pentecostalism emerged out of the dispute over the proper formula for water baptism.²⁸ He further clarifies the dispute which took place between Holiness and Finished-Work Pentecostals. This occurred when William H. Durham proclaimed that identification with Jesus Christ was what provided salvation and sanctification and that no second work of grace was supported by scripture. He was opposed by the Holiness Pentecostals who held to the Wesleyan belief in sanctification as a second work of grace and the baptism of the Spirit as a third distinct experience. Ultimately the holiness three-step Pentecostalism would find its strongest support in the Church of God denomination Cleveland, Tennessee while the Finished-Work Pentecostalism is most prominently represented by the Assemblies of God. “Oneness

²⁷ Ibid. 77.

²⁸ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 134.

Pentecostalism emerged on the scene around the spring of 1913 and is associated with the camp meeting held at Arroyo Seco.”²⁹

Prior to this event, various aspects of Oneness theology had manifested itself in the Pentecostal movement but it was at the Arroyo Seco camp meeting that this theological position was consolidation. Maria Woodworth-Etter, one of the speakers at this camp meeting echoed the growing concern over the fragmentation of the movement and called on the audience to renew their bonds of love and strife for unity. Some had been concerned that the Pentecostal movement had focused too exclusively on the Holy Spirit and in so doing neglected the central role of Christ. With the consciousness of the fact that the scriptures confirmed the Holy Spirit testifying of Christ and not the reverse stimulated a renewed focus on Christ as a unifying center. This call for unity was amplified by Robert Macallister who suggested to the gathering that water baptisms should be administered in the name of Jesus alone and not in the Trinitarian formula names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³⁰ Rather than fulfilling the intent of unifying the Pentecostal movement, this new revelation triggered further theological division within the movement. Those who embraced the Oneness theology proposed a merger of salvation, sanctification and baptism in the Holy Spirit into a single experience at the birth of the Spirit which is sealed by baptism in the name of Jesus.³¹

History of the Church of God Denomination

²⁹ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003) 194.

³⁰ Ibid., 194.

³¹ Ibid., 195.

Conn in his book, *Where the Saints Have Trod* (1959), records the genesis of the Church of God as taking place in 1886, when a group of nine believers gathered in the Tennessee – North Carolina border to seek a closer relationship with Christ and calling themselves the “Christian Union”.³² The small group was composed of individuals from the Baptist and Methodist background and led by two former Baptist preachers Richard G. Spurling and Richard G. Spurling, Jr. Disillusioned by the apparent lack of spiritual vitality in their former churches, the group met to pray and study Scriptures and church history in search of answers. They prayed intensely to see the Body of Christ revived and longed to see a Reformation of the church in their time. “Following the death of the elder Spurling, the son carried on alone until 1896, when his group was merged with another band, led by a Baptist deacon, named W. F. Bryant, which was similarly seeking a purer and holier way of life.”³³

Arriving at the conclusion that efforts to reform their own churches was futile, the expanding group eventually established a new church with the objective of advancing sound scriptural doctrines, consecration and evangelism. Conn further states that “it was decided that the new born church should be named Christian Union in accordance with its purpose to bring unity and union of Christians everywhere.”³⁴ In the summer of 1896 during a revival meeting at Shearer School House in Cherokee County in North Carolina, the worshippers received an unusual spiritual anointing and spoke in strange languages.³⁵ The humble believers searched the scriptures and interpreted their experience as similar

³² Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959), 11.

³³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God. Definitive Edition* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1996), 12.

³⁵ Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959), 12.

to the day of Pentecost when those in the Upper Room were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The congregation experienced steady growth in spite of intense persecution. Other preachers joined the group and helped to increase the implementation of evangelism in the region. According to Conn, the name of the group was changed to the Holiness Church in 1902 in response to the need to safeguard from religious fanaticism. The group of churches came together for a general assembly in 1906 and the following year, adopted the name Church of God.³⁶

This small band of believers was joined by a passionate preacher named Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson who had been a part of the Society of Friends in Indiana. Tomlinson made the acquaintance of a Methodist preacher named J. B. Mitchell and in the spring of 1894 they founded the Book and Track Company. He would accompany Mitchell on short-term mission trip into the Appalachian Mountains where they distributed literature or tracks to poor whites. It was here that A. J. Tomlinson was introduced to a more radical degree of independent holiness through his acquaintance of the dynamic evangelist Frank Sandford. According to Roger Robins, Sandford had risen through the ranks of New England Holiness and left mentors like A. B. Simpson and Timothy Merritt to establish his own militant brand of holiness primitivism which featured an authoritarian ecclesiology, a fervent pursuit of signs and wonders and a commitment to Christian communalism as described in the book of Acts. He further noted that, in the spring of 1898, Tomlinson resigned from the Society of Friends and a year later led his family and six other missionaries to the mountains of North Carolina.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., 53.

³⁷ James R. Goff Jr. and Grant Wacker, *Portraits of a Generation* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 354.

The group settled in a remote rural community of Culberson, North Carolina, where they structured their life around the principles of the hundred-fold gospel.

This term alluded to the practice at Shiloh where Sandford had read the parable of the sower, with its 30, 60 and 100 fold yields as a typology of church membership. The 100 fold members would give their all, selling their positions and hold all things in common like the early church in Jerusalem.³⁸

Tomlinson was forced to flee because of the threat of attack from angry neighbors and upon his return to Culberson several of his fellow missionaries abandoned the communal existence because of survival hardship. Prior to his departure from Culberson he had developed friendship with several of the mountain holiness preachers, which included such individuals as Richard G. Spurling Jr., William F. Bryant, Frank Porter and Emmis Lemmons. When he returned to North Carolina he became aware of the establishment of a new church which had been established by his friends. The church was known as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek. Robins noted that Tomlinson met with them on June 13, 1903, for further discussions and on that day was accepted as a member, ordained by the group and appointed pastor.³⁹ Anderson captured the theological shift of the Church of God denomination when he chronicled the event which marked the move from Holiness to Pentecostal identity. He cited that in 1908 the Church of God became Pentecostal when G. B. Cashwell who had received the Spirit baptism at Azusa Street.⁴⁰ Although Tomlinson had been preaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit he had not yet had the experience. He invited G. B. Cashwell to speak at the General Assembly that year. Anderson captured what followed when he stated:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 358.

⁴⁰ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 54.

And, indeed, for a man who had known his share of eye-popping experiential wonders, it must have been hard to imagine one to top them all - but not for long. With Cashwell behind the pulpit, Tomlinson slid to the floor and commenced a Holy Ghost baptism of epic proportions, complete with ecstatic contortions and reports of levitation, soul travel, and spiritual visions. By the time it subsided he had spoken, by his count, ten different languages. A. J. Tomlinson had made the short but significant leap from Holiness to Pentecostal.⁴¹

In 1909 the office of General Overseer was created and A. J. Tomlinson was selected in that capacity until around 1922-23.⁴² Tomlinson nurtured relations with white as well as Black Pentecostals and several Black congregations joined the denomination. Conflict however, over church government and financial mismanagement led to his impeachment and ultimate separation from the denomination. Several of the congregations went with Tomlinson and they formed another denomination. Tomlinson lost the greater portion of the denomination and for several years both sides fought over divided congregations and dismayed members.⁴³ For decades they litigated the right to use the name Church of God and eventually Tomlinson's group settled on the name Church of God of Prophecy. During that time the Church of God experienced significant growth and presently has a world-wide membership of over 6 million with a presence in over 150 countries⁴⁴.

History of the Church of God Denomination in Jamaica

The Church of God denomination expanded as individuals responded to the divine call on their lives to carry the gospel to various states. According to Conn (1959),

⁴¹ James R. Goff Jr. and Grant Wacker, *Portraits of a Generation* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 360.

⁴² Ibid., 364.

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ www.churchofgod.org.

“less than a year after the church was established in Alabama and Florida in 1909, its first missionary went to the Bahamas Island.”⁴⁵ Rebecca and Edmund S. Barr, natives of the Bahamas, came in contact with the Church of God while visiting a camp meeting in Florida. After they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they felt a divine call to return home with the Pentecostal message. Conn stated in a later work, *Like A Mighty Army* (1996), they were followed shortly by R. M. and Ida Evans, retired Methodist pastors, who had joined the Church of God. This confirms that the first missionary effort of the Church of God, in 1909-1910 was an interracial venture. Edmund S. Barr (Black) and R. M. Evans (white) were friends who attended the Pleasant Grove camp meeting in Florida and later served together in the Bahamas.⁴⁶

It is documented that as early as 1917, Jamaica already had a number of independent churches. The origins of these churches are unsure.⁴⁷ The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) was in existence on the island as early as 1914. Conn noted that these were difficult times for the island and most nation states, as they grappled with the effects of World War I. That year, J. Wilson Bell, a white American pioneer missionary in Jamaica pursued a relationship with the Church of God.⁴⁸ Before the affiliation became cemented, Bell’s three small children became ill with food poisoning. Believing in God’s divine healing Bell did not seek medical attention for his children. He was imprisoned by the civil authorities when one child died as a result. In response to a letter from Bell, J.S. Llewellyn came to Jamaica in April 1918 and

⁴⁵ Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959), 12.

⁴⁶ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, Definitive Edition* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1996), 114-115.

⁴⁷ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

⁴⁸ Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959), 61.

organized a church of seven members in Kingston and appointed J.M. Parkinson as national pastor.⁴⁹ Conn further reported that Parkinson and his sister Nina Stapleton opened five preaching stations in or near Kingston, but most of the stations survived only for a brief period due to lack of funds. When E.E. Simmons, a pioneer preacher from Florida, arrived in April 23, 1925 he found no trace of the Church of God in the city of Kingston.⁵⁰ Soon after, he was contacted by H.A. Hudson and directed to Borobridge in Clarendon where he found a happy group of spirit-filled people. When Simmons left five months later, he left behind three organized churches in the parish of Clarendon: Borobridge, Mount Providence and Frankfield.⁵¹ “T.A. Sears, a Negro minister of Arkansas succeeded E. E. Simmons as missionary to Jamaica at the Assembly of 1925.”⁵² The Church of God denomination was officially registered in 1925 and in order to distinguish the new organization from other Pentecostal groups using the name Church of God, it was registered under the name New Testament Church of God. T.A. Sears served a brief tenure and around 1927 was succeeded by Z.R. Thomas, a Floridian preacher in his early sixties. Thomas spent eight years in Jamaica, during which time he worked alongside the Jamaican preachers in evangelizing several other parishes. Conn (1959) reports, that Jamaica held its first Island Convention July 4-6, 1928 with seven organized churches. He further stated that when Thomas was forced to retire in 1935 due to ill health, Jamaica had fifty-three organized churches with a membership of one thousand five hundred and ninety five members.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 63.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Charles W. Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod: History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1959), 65.

The second decade of existence was one marked by persecution as the young denomination expanded across the island. Lindsay Arscott in his book, *Forward in Faith* (1971), wrote of the persecution meted out on the New Testament Church of God categorized the persecution as coming from citizens, from civil authorities and from other clergy.⁵⁴ As new congregations sprung up across the island, many experienced hostility from local residents who witnessed what they labeled as “These jumping Pentecostals” and who they believed to be a part of a cult akin to the Pocomania cult. According to the Britannica, Pocomania is a syncretic religious movement that base their beliefs on Christianity and West African traditions. Their ritual meetings involve prayers, dances, and rhythmic drumming.”⁵⁵

Arscott further reports that there were many reports of hostile citizens throwing stones at the Church of God members. Since many of the Church buildings were temporary structures with open sides covered over with sheets of zinc, stones could be hurled right into the frail sanctuaries. While much of the hostility was prevalent, there were also testimonials of hostile agitators falling under the power of the Holy Spirit and yielding to the call of God upon their lives. On the other hand, there were also similar testimonials of recalcitrant agitators who died mysteriously and their deaths were interpreted as divine judgment from God. He further states that in some parishes the persecution came from civil authorities who imposed judgments against pastors and their congregations for such punitive charges as being too loud or worshipping too late into the nights. On many occasions when the church sought legal redress against those who disrupted the church services, either by stone throwing or verbal disturbances, their plea

⁵⁴ Lindsay Arscott, *Forward in Faith: The Story of the New Testament Church in Jamaica* (Jamaica: Hallmark Publishers Limited, 1971), 12.

⁵⁵ www.britannica.com.

was ignored by the local magistrate. Unable to afford proper legal representation, the congregations once again resorted to the weapons of prayer and fasting to protect them.

The young Caribbean extension of the denomination was also subjected to hostility from the established churches. Arscott states,

When the Church of God entered a community, it was characterized by its preaching of a “hot gospel”. In today’s language one would say, “telling it as it is”. As a result of “telling it as it is” many people, including members of the “old-line” churches, saw themselves as they were. Many of these members embraced what was to them a “new gospel”, left their churches and began to worship with the Church of God.⁵⁶

It was commonly reported by some of the early pioneers that the pastors of some of these established churches incited rogues to physically attack the Church of God members. When this approach failed to deter the passion of these humble believers, their children were subjected to intimidating acts by teachers in the public school. These children of Church of God members were told that they could never get jobs as long as they identified with the church because it was not recognized by the government and the ministers could not give written recommendation. The fear of not being accepted in training college or getting a job as a civil servant deterred many of the younger more ambitious members. The fact that most of the Church of God preachers were unlearned men while most of the established churches were led by seminary trained pastors, made these misrepresentations even more plausible. These smear attacks were further amplified by the fact that the denomination was still young and most of the pastors had not received their marriage license.

Arscott reports that the Church of God established a Bible School in 1944 and that by 1945 there were churches in all fourteen parishes of the island. It is reported that the

⁵⁶ Lindsay Arscott, *Forward in Faith: The Story of the New Testament Church in Jamaica* (Jamaica: Hallmark Publishers Limited, 1971), 14.

pastors resisted the idea of a Bible School due to the notion of Pentecostal preaching being dependent solely on prayer and the anointing. However as students ministered in the local churches during the summer holidays the Church of God pastors began to change their views about Bible college. Arscott noted that by the late 40s and early 50s many of the upcoming pastors were graduates of the Bible College and those who could not attend the college signed up for correspondence courses abroad. As a result of the growing quest for theological education, the denomination began to experience revitalization across the island. Pastors became better students of the scriptures and in turn encouraged their members to develop a greater appreciation for Bible studies. According to Arscott, by the 1950s the Church of God in Jamaica had developed a strong leadership structure of four ministry offices: Island Overseer, Parish Overseer, District Overseer and Local Pastor. Later the office of Parish Overseer was replaced with County Overseer. This reduction from 14 parish overseers to 3 county overseers resulted in tension among the ministers and some of the former parish overseers left the denomination to establish independent ministries.⁵⁷

Arscott (1971) noted that while the ministry grew rapidly it had neglected its building program. Many congregations were worshipping in buildings which were dilapidated or incomplete because of lack of funds. It was then, that God ordained a new leader from Canada to revitalize the building program. Arscott states “In 1958 however, the Jamaica Church of God received for its overseer, Bishop L. R. Summers, another Nehemiah, ‘a prophet of temple building.’”⁵⁸ For the next twelve years, the denomination embarked on a major building program. Bishop Somers, himself a gifted

⁵⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 22.

builder led delegations of tradesmen to remote parts of the country to build new church buildings or complete unfinished ones. With such an inspirational leader and Jamaica achieving independence in 1962, the Jamaican church gained a new sense of independence and responsibility.

As the denomination grew in strength, the leadership strategically focused on establishing a presence in more populated towns. The Church of God established its own Missions Board which would be responsible for promoting local and foreign missions. This simple move would prove pivotal in shifting the denomination from being merely an evangelistic church to being a missionary one. For many years Jamaican pastors led congregations in Grand Turks, Grand Cayman, St. Croix and other Caribbean islands. Bethel Bible College also grew in prominence as a Church of God institution training students from Jamaica as well as the other Caribbean islands. Eventually the Church of God in Jamaica achieved the distinction as the fastest growing denomination in the island.

The New Testament Church of God is now the largest Pentecostal denomination in Jamaica. “Some 30% of all Jamaicans are now members of Pentecostal churches.”⁵⁹ From a conversation with the present overseer of the Church of God in Jamaica, he stated that as of November 2007, “The Church of God in Jamaica and Grand Cayman presently has a membership of 92,000 and 273 credentialed ministers.” Anderson reports that both the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy were introduced to England by Jamaican immigrants (laypeople) in the fifties, and they have since become the largest Black-led denominations in the United Kingdom. Having lived in England, Canada and

⁵⁹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

the United States, I have observed that this missionary thrust was also obvious in Ontario, Canada where Jamaicans or their offspring accounted for the vast majority of the membership.

History of the Church of God of East Flatbush

The Church of God of East Flatbush (COGEF) was established in the late 60s by a small group of Jamaican immigrants in Brooklyn, New York, who wanted to continue their tradition of worshipping in the Church of God denomination while retaining the cultural practices transplanted from their homeland. These immigrants migrated to New York City, and in so doing experienced a deep sense of loss and isolation from their spiritual and cultural roots. The birth of Church of God of East Flatbush helped to alleviate acculturation stress and culture shock by providing a sense of familiarity reminiscent of their country of origin. The fortitude and pioneering spirit which helped the denomination to survive persecution back in Jamaica became an asset to this small group of immigrants who dreamt of having their own church.

Through informal networking, the church served as a haven for Jamaican immigrants by providing a support system for the members while maintaining their cultural identity and Church of God affiliation. As the network of believers expanded by word of mouth and telephone contacts, other Jamaican Church of God members who were worshipping in non-Church of God congregations began visiting the meetings. The group was led by capable lay persons who were exposed to ministry while back in Jamaica. Eventually contact was made with Rev. Guy Notice, a prominent Jamaican pastor who was attending the Northwest Bible College in North Dakota. Rev. Notice was

invited to come to Brooklyn to meet with the group and consider becoming the pastor. Under the supervision of State Overseer R.D. Harris, the group was officially organized in 1970 and Rev. Guy Notice was appointed pastor. The ministry grew quickly due to the interest of Jamaican immigrants in New York. Later that year they moved into a small storefront on Albany Avenue with a seating capacity of fifty which became quickly overcrowded.

In 1972, Rev. Guy Notice returned to Jamaica to become principal of the Bethel Bible College and Rev. Peter Gayle, his assistant, assumed the role of pastor. The church continued to experience steady growth and in 1974, executed the certificate of incorporation with the Church of God. Having once again outgrown its facilities, the congregation decided to purchase a Jewish synagogue located at 409-15 East 95th Street in the East Flatbush area of Brooklyn. Members of the church faithfully made enormous sacrifices, conducting food sales, donating weeks and month's salary in order to purchase the building. As the church continued to experience steady growth, new ministries were developed to meet the growing needs. As the reputation of the church extended abroad, emigrants from Jamaica and those who came via England residing in Brooklyn made Church of God of East Flatbush their spiritual home. Some of the new members were ministers who had migrated to Brooklyn with their families and they immediately became involved in the ministries of the church. Amid the rapid growth of the church new congregations were birthed in Brooklyn, New Jersey and Florida. In 1990 the church purchased a twelve family apartment building across the street from the church building with the goal of renovating the building to provide housing for the needy, uncared for and unwed single mothers. The following year when it was realized that this purchase would

not alleviate the seating problems during worship, the church purchased a four family building behind the sanctuary with the goal of expanding the present sanctuary. In 1993 after twenty two years as pastor, Rev. Peter Gayle announced his retirement due to ill health, effective August 31, 1994.

In 1994 the church officially opened an Early Childhood School which is named Gayle Academy for Children, in honor of Rev. Peter Gayle. The same year, Rev. Lindsay Arscott who served as principal of Bethel Bible College in Jamaica was asked to move to Brooklyn to become pastor. Under Rev. Arscott's leadership the church continued to experience growth and in 1997 the congregation began conducting two Sunday morning services. On December 25th 2001, Rev. Arscott's wife Evangeline passed away and a year later he became ill and died in January 2003. In April 2003, Bishop R. C. Hugh Nelson was appointed as Senior Pastor.

The church is located in an area characterized by high mobility, mostly of immigrants and working class families. The congregation is composed of middle to lower income families with an increasing number of university graduates with higher earning potential. There are more than seventeen nationalities represented in the congregation. However, over eighty percent of the membership and ninety nine percent of the leadership remains first generation Jamaicans.

Conclusion

A brief history of the modern Pentecostal movement confirms its global impact and attraction. Pentecostalism has achieved a diverse cross-cultural membership and its ability to cross racial and national boundaries have aided its ongoing expansion. The

spread of Pentecostalism did not only create room for indigenous denominations but helped to revitalize the older established churches. Some may argue that many of the early Pentecostal missionaries were untrained in theology and ill-prepared to work with different ethnic groups, but their willingness to sacrifice and place themselves in harms way for the sake of the gospel had far reaching effects. They were also instrumental in revitalizing the involvement of the laity in world evangelization.

The Church of God of East Flatbush continues to practice a form of Pentecostalism which encourages high emotional worship services. Each worship service ends with a call for conversion and members are encouraged to seek for the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There is an increased emphasis on teaching the Declaration of Faith and helping members to distinguish between spirituality and culturally held practices. As a result there is a greater embrace and celebration of cultural diversity and less attention to culturally defined practices which were once imposed on the congregation. All members are encouraged to practice modesty in attire and therefore no restrictions are placed on women wearing jewelry or trousers to worship services.

During the pre-9/11 event the Church of God of East Flatbush grew with a steady influx of Jamaican immigrants, many of whom were undocumented. With a more rigid Immigration and Naturalization procedure and a steady exodus of senior members migrating to the warmer states, the Church of God of East Flatbush is awakening to the necessity of growing beyond the Jamaican national identity. The congregation lost many of its American-born youths who chose to become involved in other Brooklyn congregations or remain un-churched. There is a great need at the Church of God of East Flatbush to widen its evangelistic programs to reach beyond the Jamaican culture.

Although several water baptism services are held each year at the Church of God of East Flatbush, there is still difficulty in assimilating the new members into the church family. Some new members who did not have prior family contacts in the congregation usually disappear within months. While a mentoring system for new members have been instituted, its effectiveness is still to be proven. The church has continued to function as a family with a greater security placed on having additional family support within the congregation. The challenge calls for a ministry shift which will define this congregation by its spirituality rather than merely its culture.

CHAPTER 3

Pentecostal Theology

Introduction

The Church of God of East Flatbush is a part of a Pentecostal denomination and therefore a review of our theology and its impact on cultural inclusion is a necessary phase of this project. This chapter will review the modern Pentecostal movement, and secondly, the biblical/theological paradigm for cultural inclusion. Thirdly, it will examine a biblical model of cultural reconciliation. Fourthly, this chapter will also review the Azusa Street mission, a model of historical Pentecostal inclusion and next, the Church of God denomination's response to the race relations. Lastly, it will explore the challenge of cultural inclusion facing the Church of God of East Flatbush.

The Modern Pentecostal Movement

The modern Pentecostal Movement erupted on the pages of history around the turning of a new century. These were anxiety evoking times and therefore the movement was easily perceived as a precursor to some divine in-breaking upon the world. The decadence of the times and the anticipation of divine judgment by those immersed in the Holiness Movement no doubt also had some theological bearing upon the infant Pentecostal Movement. In the eyes of these early pioneers, the established churches had lost their spiritual fervor and settled for dull religion. According to Conn (1996), Richard

G. Spurling one of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement believed that greater emphasis was being placed on rituals rather than the simple faith in Christ and sin was excused or embraced in spirit if not in word.⁶⁰ The early Pentecostal leaders came into Pentecost from varied ecclesiastical backgrounds and brought perceptions and theological insights from their former affiliations. Some were Methodist, Baptist, Salvationist, Presbyterians, Holiness and even Quakers and seem to weave some strain of their former associations into the eclectic construct of Pentecostalism. From its infancy Pentecostalism viewed traditional theology with great suspicion. Many early Pentecostals went as far as to suggest that theology not only restricted the mind but served as a blockage to the flow of the Spirit.⁶¹ They were engaged in a quest to experience God in all His fullness and did not want the theological reflection of the mind to hinder this experience. Although Pentecostals have long been labeled as a people consumed by a passion for the experience of the Holy Spirit, the inevitability of explaining or clarifying what they experienced, while under the power of the Holy Spirit, would ultimately result in some kind of theological treatise. On many occasions when individuals came under the power of the Spirit they would often become ecstatic and some would even fall to the ground. Frank Bartleman in his book, *Azusa Street* (1980), wrote,

Some one might be speaking. Suddenly the Spirit would fall upon the congregation. God himself would give the altar call. Men would fall all over the house, like the slain in battle, or rush for the altar enmasse, to seek God. The scene often resembled a forest of fallen trees. Such a scene cannot be imitated. I never saw an altar call given in these early days. God himself would call them.⁶²

⁶⁰ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, Definitive Edition*, (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1996), 9.

⁶¹ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 66.

⁶² Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (South Plainfield, New Jersey: Bridge Publishing Inc., 1980), 59-60.

They would often testify that their entire being was under the influence of a power greater than their human capacity. Some would lie on the floor in silence for extended periods and when they regained their composure, would testify of supernatural encounters.

Pentecostal theology therefore emerged out of the numerous testimonies and discourses of individuals who attempted to make sense of what they supposedly experienced while under the control of the Holy Spirit. According to Jacobson (2003), “Pentecostal theology was born out of the need to bring words and experiences together, to connect thought with the experience of the Spirit in ways that fostered God’s work in the world.”⁶³ Pentecostal theology could be considered dissimilar to other theological traditions in that it is considered less scholarly and too individually based. Protestant theology highlights the systematic discussion of the classical themes of Christian theology such as the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the church, etc. While many theologians found this systematic approach helpful, others have also found it limiting in its approach. Steve Land in his book, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (2003) argues that Pentecostal theology is more spiritualistic and less rationalistic than the standard approach. He suggests that Pentecostal theology properly understood will value orthopathy (right affections or experience) just as much as it values orthodoxy (right praise, confession or belief) and orthopraxy (right praxis or behavior).⁶⁴ Pentecostal theology most often finds

⁶³ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 2.

⁶⁴ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. (New York, New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 41.

its expression in the songs, sermons and testimonies of the local congregation rather than the ivy tower of the seminary.

A Biblical/Theological Paradigm for Cultural Inclusion

The writers of the New Testament were careful to convey the cross cultural nature of Jesus' ministry from His birth to His resurrection. The journey from His birth to His resurrection is crisscrossed with the interjection of those who were marginalized and rejected by society. Observe the detailed manner in which Matthew began his Gospel. He recorded that the child Jesus was visited by a Magi from Asia. He also quoted Isaiah to introduce Jesus as the one who was the fulfillment of prophecy, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned".⁶⁵ Galilee reflected the demographics of much of the Roman Empire. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1988) defines the Gentiles as those of the surrounding nations, foreigners as opposed to Israel.⁶⁶ While Jesus was raised in a setting which maintained a Jewish religious and cultural identity he was no doubt exposed to the influences of other cultures.

Jesus demonstrated an inclusive approach in the very choice of disciples. He chose twelve men which included a tax collector and a zealot. Tax collectors were despised as collaborators with the Gentile, enemy of Israel, the Roman Empire and zealots were feared because of their militant views that called for the violent overthrow of the Romans. Jesus also included a number of women in His ministry team which

⁶⁵ Matthew 4.15-16, NKJV.

⁶⁶ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 465.

included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others.⁶⁷ In the book, *United by Faith*, DeYoung et al (2003) notes that Jesus intentionally reached out broadly to all he encountered by inviting them to participate in the life of his congregation of followers and practice what scholars call “table fellowship”. Table fellowship he purports denotes those found worthy of inclusion in ones social circle.⁶⁸ For example, the person one shared a meal with made a statement about the kind of friends one had. The Bible offers several examples of Jesus fellowshiping around meals, i.e. Jesus attended a marriage feast with his disciples - John 2:1-12; The Lord Supper – Mark 14:22-25; His visit to Mary and Martha’s house – Luke 10: 38:42, the supper at Bethany – John 12:1-7 and His encounter with Zacchaeus – Luke 19:1-10.

The authors further stated that the Pharisees also followed this practice of table fellowship, and used it to maintain the purity of their nation and to model the exclusive ethnocentric identity of Israel.⁶⁹ Jesus demonstrated an inclusive ministry which challenged the practice of religious exclusion by using the very symbol of affirmation and acceptance to include all people. As a result, He was criticized by the Pharisees on several occasions for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus lived out a radical kind of inclusion which motivated Him to touch the untouchable and befriended those who were not considered worthy of friendship. He stepped outside His own ethnic circle and ministered to Gentiles. John records Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman who

⁶⁷ Luke 8:2-3, NKJV.

⁶⁸ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

challenged Him to respond to the social and religious separation of Jews and Samaritans.⁷⁰

On another occasion, Jesus had an encounter with the moneychangers in the temple which created an opportunity to further amplify His quest for inclusivity. The gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke all noted Jesus' quote from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 56:7) but only the book of Mark included the entire quotation. Jesus declared, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?"⁷¹ The writer of Mark's Gospel understood the importance of including the last phrase, "for all nations." It could be summarized that Jesus was making a declaration of the inclusive nature of the house of prayer. DeYoung et al states, "We conclude that Jesus' inclusive table fellowship and vision of a house of prayer that was for all the nations was a precursor to what we call multiracial congregations. Jesus' 'congregation' of followers was multicultural."⁷²

Pentecostals historically base their theological and ministry praxis on the accounts recorded in the early chapters in the Book of Acts of the Apostles. The Book of Acts was written by Luke and describes the narrative of the humble disciples who in obedience to the instruction of Jesus Christ remained in the Upper Room until they experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Chapter one of Acts records the promise of the Holy Spirit in the words of Jesus when He instructed His followers not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. When the disciples came together to inquire of Him pertaining to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, He said to them,

⁷⁰ John 4, NKJV.

⁷¹ Mark 11:17, NKJV.

⁷² Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.⁷³

The second chapter of Acts reports that on the Day of Pentecost the disciples were all with one accord in one place, when suddenly a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind filled the house where they were sitting. Divided tongues as of fire sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. This event was observed by a great multitude of devote men from every nation; they were perplexed when they heard the gospel preached in their own language. They marveled at these phenomena and questioned the ability of the Galilean disciples to speak the language of the Persians, Medes and Elamites from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia and Phrygia. Palestine was divided into three provinces—Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Galileans were native or inhabitants of Galilee. “The Galileans were generous and impulsive, of simple manners, earnest piety, and intense nationalism.”⁷⁴ They were often described as impulsive, passionate and at times violent. Galileans were easily recognized by their dialect and voice inflections as seen by the detection of Peter, a Galilean, as one of Christ’s disciples as recorded in Mark 14:17. According to Unger (1988), “The name Galilean was applied as a way of reproach to early Christians and the emperor Julian used the term when speaking of Christ or Christians and referred to Christ as the Galilean God”.⁷⁵

The genesis of the New Testament church took place amidst Galilean believers who had remained in Jerusalem during the crucifixion and resurrection. With Jesus no

⁷³ Acts 1:7-8, NKJV.

⁷⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 452.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

longer with them physically, the leadership of the emerging church rested on the shoulders of these unsophisticated Galileans. They needed the power of the Spirit to aid them in realizing Jesus' vision of a house of prayer for all nations. On the day of Pentecost, the multitude was amazed and perplexed that from the lips of a small band of Galileans they heard the testimony of Christ in their own language. Mockingly they said, "They are full of new wine."⁷⁶ Peter replied and said;

For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: and it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your young men shall see vision, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophecy.⁷⁷

Chapters three and four of the Book of Acts record the healing of the lame man and the subsequent prosecution of Peter and John. When they were arrested and brought before the magistrates to defend and explain the source of the power by which they had healed the lame man, Peter under the power of the Holy Spirit explained that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the lame man was made whole.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.⁷⁸

Chapter five records the deception of Ananias and Sapphira and how they fell dead at the feet of Peter and the great fear that came upon the church. Many signs and wonders were done by the hands of the apostles and the church experienced growth on a daily basis.

⁷⁶ Acts 2:13, NKJV.

⁷⁷ Acts 2:16-18, NKJV.

⁷⁸ Acts 4:13-14, NKJV.

A Biblical Model of Cultural Reconciliation

Chapter six of the Book of Acts records a model approach to resolving ethnic disparity within the church. One gains a picture of a young church which is multicultural and multilingual from its very inception. As the Lord added daily to the church, the pull of cultural equity would later test the leadership structure of the church. However, what could have disrupted the stability of the young church instead further created room for a new paradigm of multicultural leadership. By expanding the leadership structure those on the margins (the Hellenist) were able to become a part of the center, thus exploding the potential of the church's efforts towards evangelization.

This opportunity arose out of a murmur of discontent. There was a murmur in the church against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. In actuality they were all Jews but some were Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine and the Hellenist were Jews connected with the Diaspora, many of whom displayed Hellenist customs and language. "The term Hellenist was used to describe a person who spoke Greek but was not racially of the Greek nation."⁷⁹ The Hellenists were looked upon with suspicion by most of the orthodox Jews who questioned the authenticity of their faith and religious practices. The Hebrew believers, on the other hand, were those who had come with Jesus from Galilee. They represented the traditional leadership in the church. They were in charge of the daily distribution which implies that food for the widows was actually served at tables or it could have referred to financial assistance.

⁷⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 551.

Whether done deliberately or not, the murmuring among the Hellenistic Jews was the outcome of feeling neglected and overlooked. It is possible that the Galileans who had experienced the discrimination from other Jews were less than exposed to proper management skills and may have operated in a very limited structure with little regard for those who were on the margins of the growing congregation. Faced with the challenges of a rapidly expanding congregation with a small leadership structure, the Galilean leadership could have ignored or trivialized the plight of the Hellenistic Jews. There is no indication in the scripture that the Hellenistic Jews were blamed or scolded for murmuring. After seeking direction from the Holy Spirit, the apostles took an unusual and radical step and expanded the management structure by adding a new level of leadership. The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said,

It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business: but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word.”⁸⁰

What could have resulted in an ethnic division or separation of the early church became the catalyst for further leadership expansion, because the progressive minded apostles recognized the importance of expanding leadership to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity in the congregation. The apostles chose not to appoint the deacons but to present the qualities required and invite the congregation to choose. The suggestion pleased the people and they choose, Stephen, Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas. After the new deacons were presented before the apostles, they prayed and laid hands on them.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Acts 6:2-4, NKJV.

⁸¹ Acts 6:6, NKJV.

The Scriptures states, “Then the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”.⁸² A brief study of the names of the seven who were elected would suggest they were all Hellenistic Jews. Gonzales in his essay on “Reading from My Bicultural Place”: Acts 6:1-7, notes that it is inconceivable to some scholars that this community where the majority was still Hebrews would put the management of its assets in the hand of seven Hellenists.⁸³ By empowering these newly appointed deacons to handle the administrative task of benevolence, the apostles were able to direct their full attention to the ministry of the Word.

A further reading of the text shows Stephen along with serving tables witnessing through the preached Word and ultimately becoming the first martyr. Most of the Greek-speaking leaders and members fled the city due to the extreme persecution that followed Stephen’s martyrdom. Yet as they fled they took the Pentecostal message of Jesus wherever they went and the first-century church grew rapidly beyond the center of Jerusalem and Judaism. In the next chapter Phillip, also one of the seven deacons is led by the Spirit to preach in the city of Samaria with great miracles accompanying his ministry. Given the prolonged animosity and ethnic tension between Samaritans and Jews at the time, this was a phenomenal demonstration of the Gospel crossing cultural biases. The Spirit led him towards the road which descended from Jerusalem to Gaza. It was there he met the Ethiopian eunuch, a man of great authority under Candace, the queen of

⁸² Acts 6:7, NKJV.

⁸³ Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, “Reading from this Place, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective”, Volume 1 (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 144.

the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury.⁸⁴ Phillip explained the Scriptures to the eunuch and eventually baptized him in water in response to his request.

The book of Acts chapter ten records an event in which Peter received a spiritual revelation while in a trance on his rooftop. Peter saw a sheet lowered with all manner of four footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air and heard the instruction to rise, kill and eat. His ceremonial consciousness immediately spurred a rejection of the offering. It was only after he received the revelation that Peter recognized that God wanted to expand his cultural fellowship and ministry.⁸⁵ It took a divine revelation for Peter to heed the invitation to travel to the house of Cornelius, a Roman officer who lived in Caesarea. In obedience to the Spirit he preached to Cornelius and his entire household was converted to Christianity. Even as he observed the results of the preached Word, Peter was stunned to see the church expanding beyond its Jewish ethnic identity. The author of Acts wisely described these multicultural incidents to educate and enlighten us about the cross-cultural pull of the Gospel. Rather than avoiding this diverse appeal, we can model what the Jerusalem church did. They confronted the matter prayerfully and immediately.

The writer of Acts then shifts the spotlight to the conversion of Saul, later renamed Paul, who was neither one of the twelve apostles nor one of the seven deacons. We also notice a shift in focus as the new emphasis was placed on the mission to the Gentiles. With the exception of Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Chapter ten, Acts shows the ever expanding growth of the church from the twelve apostles to the seven deacons and then the outreach to the Gentiles.

⁸⁴ Acts 8:27, NKJV.

⁸⁵ Acts 10:9, NKJV.

The early church continued to grow with a multicultural quality. DeYoung et al (2003) suggests: “This tendency towards congregations that reconciled Jews and Gentiles became the standard of the early church. While Jews often started congregations within their own ethnic group, soon Gentiles would join”.⁸⁶ The church in Antioch was established in a city with a very diverse population. DeYoung et al further noted, “Ethnic strife was intense. Enslaved persons composed close to one third of Antioch’s population, ‘many of whom had been deported from their homeland in the wake of ruinous wars with no hope of improving their position’”.⁸⁷ The persecution of the believers in Jerusalem stemmed a flow of migration of Greek speaking Jewish Christians to Antioch where a congregation was birth which included Jews and Gentiles. Barnabas recruited Saul of Tarsus (Paul) and other leaders emerged like Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manean, a member of the court of Herod the ruler.⁸⁸

DeYoung et al observed that the Antioch congregation was varied evidenced by the diverse leadership from the inception of the congregation. Their performance of inclusive table fellowship imitated Jesus’ lifestyle and social practices.⁸⁹ The new converts who joined the young church were culturally affirmed. Conversely, they were also challenged to assume the greater loyalty to Jesus Christ. “Jews and Gentiles continued to embrace their culture of origin but broke with certain cultural rules that inhibited their ability to live as one in Christ”.⁹⁰ Jews and Gentiles shared in fellowship as

⁸⁶ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Acts 13:1, NKJV.

⁸⁹ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

one in the various house churches while living in a society which prohibited this practice. In order for the Jewish Christians to participate in this level of egalitarianism they willingly surrendered the privileges of ethnic identity. The authors further stated,

The social commentators of the day in Antioch could not identify the followers of Jesus with any known group. The members of the Antioch congregation certainly did not practice pagan rites or emperor worship. Nor did they all live by Jewish cultural and religious standards, so they called them Christians or Christ followers (Acts 11:26). This name declared that they made up “a social but not an ethnic group.”⁹¹

Paul and his coworkers founded new congregations in a similar fashion by preaching first to the Jews then to the Gentiles. The standard model practiced by Paul involved preaching at the local synagogue first where some Jews were converted and then to other nations. Diversified Antioch was the place where Paul began his three missionary journeys. It became the central place where Paul’s ministry to the Gentile was launched.⁹² DeYoung et al (2003) observed, had the outreach begun with Gentiles, many Jews would not have found these budding communities of faith as attractive. “The cultural and religious changes required to join an all-Gentile assembly would have proven difficult at this point”.⁹³ There were no synagogues in Roman colony of Philippi in the district of Macedonia when Paul, Silas and Timothy arrived on their mission. However, as it was their strategy to witness to Jews first Paul and his companions eventually

⁹¹ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

⁹² Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 82.

⁹³ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

located a group of Jewish women who prayed by a river on the Sabbath.⁹⁴ It was here that Paul encountered the businesswoman Lydia whom he baptized along with her household. Lydia was not a Jewess but a proselyte by birth.⁹⁵ Lydia's conversion soon led to a congregation being launched and maintained in her home. Paul and Silas preached with boldness throughout the region and even cast out an evil spirit from a young woman which resulted in their arrest. While in prison they were miraculously released and when the jailer believing they had escaped was about to commit suicide, they announced their presence. His first response was, "What must I do to be saved?" Therefore the gospel effected conversion within the Jewish and Gentile quarters resulting in the first European Christian congregation being multicultural.⁹⁶

A review of the ministry established whether in Corinth, Ephesus or Rome reflected a culturally mixed church. Paul's preaching and writings appealed both to Jews and Gentiles to the very end of his ministry. His theology of ministry could be summed up in his letter to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"⁹⁷. The call upon the first-century church to work hard together to maintain cultural unity was a foreign practice in their day. There were much opposition to cultural unity and Paul often had to remind these congregations that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female.⁹⁸ This inclusive model of ministry did not die with Jesus on the cross but remained consistent with his disciples and was also demonstrated

⁹⁴ Paul Curtiss DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 30.

⁹⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 789.

⁹⁶ Act 16:11-40, NKJV.

⁹⁷ Romans 1:16, NKJV.

⁹⁸ Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-26; Colossians 3:11, NKJV.

during the early Pentecostal Movement when William Seymour led the Azusa Street Mission as an egalitarian system of selfless love.

The Azusa Street Mission – A Model of Historical Pentecostal Inclusion

William J. Seymour served as the pastor of the Azusa Street Mission in 1906 which had an epic role in making Pentecostalism a global phenomenon.⁹⁹ Unraveling the theology of William J. Seymour apart from the Azusa Street mission is a difficult task because Seymour and a group of leaders led the mission and responded to the theological issues as they arose. Seymour and his leaders felt that the Pentecostal gospel was not the end product of theological analysis but a word from God that was accessible to even the most ordinary and unlearned person. One who sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit was encouraged to empty themselves of their former doctrines and opinions in order that they could become filled. Yet while Seymour exhorted his followers to lay aside the constraints of their former theological persuasions, he also placed great emphasis on sound biblical hermeneutics, training, appointment of staff, exposition of scripture, preaching, doctrinal boundaries and church discipline.¹⁰⁰

Seymour was quite concerned that some within the Pentecostal movement simply wanted to discard theology in order to bask in the Spirit and he felt that it was important to assume a doctrinal position even if it resulted in further splits and division. He held the position that the only way to remain doctrinally pure was to build clear theological boundaries around the band of believers. He practiced and encouraged his followers to demonstrate love and respect for all Christians even those opposed to the Pentecostal

⁹⁹ Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street: Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 87-128.

revival and the mission made great effort to balance a desire for theological purity and Christian unity. In the very first issue of the *Apostolic Faith*, the publication of the Azusa Street Mission, the article of faith for the mission listed the following doctrines as essential: repentance; faith in Jesus Christ; sanctification as second work of grace; the baptism of the Holy Ghost, including the evidence of speaking in new tongues; and healing.

The revival at Azusa Street was a watershed event prompting Pentecostal leaders to self reflect more than they had before on the significance of race. Jacobsen (2003) notes,

The leaders of the mission believed that the egalitarian nature of the gospel required Pentecostalism to be anti-racist in faith and practice. And it was not merely ideals that mattered at Azusa; it was actual practice. This meant that the social ethos of the mission had to be such that even the lowliest person would feel welcomed.¹⁰¹

This provided a level of social inclusion whereby everyone felt embraced regardless of their status in society. While the anti-racist sentiments of the leaders of the Azusa Street Mission had a significant impact on the Pentecostal movement, it is important to note that not all Pentecostal leaders embraced this egalitarian approach. Charles Parham, for example, condemned the interracial worship at Azusa Street and was known to be a sympathizer of the Klu Klux Klan.¹⁰² While most Pentecostals would have agreed that the movement ought to be interracial in its overall character, they were not strong proponents of the Azusa Street model which advocated that Pentecostalism should

¹⁰¹ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 260.

¹⁰² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35.

be intentionally interracial. As the movement became more institutionalized, patterns of organizations began to mirror the segregation of the society.

This segregation was reinforced by the creation of the Assemblies of God denomination in 1914, when all the white ministers who had been a part of an affiliation of Pentecostal ministers under the leadership of Eudorus N. Bell came together to form a new organization.¹⁰³ This group of ministers was previously a part of a Pentecostal fellowship under the leadership of Charles Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ. The formation of the Assemblies of God rendered a blow to the interracial makeup of the fellowship leaving the Church of God in Christ primarily a Black denomination and the Assemblies of God almost entirely white. In 1926, the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee also voted to create a separate Negro Assembly for African American congregations within the denomination. After protest from numerous African American churches in the northern states, the Church of God backed off from this demand and made the arrangement optional.

According to Jacobsen (2003), there were three major themes which dominated the theology of both Seymour and that of the Azusa Street Mission.

The first was a three-step view of the progression of the Christian life moving from justification through sanctification to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The second major concern was how best to understand the identifying marks and manifestations that should accompany and/or follow any true reception of the baptism of the Spirit. In addition to these two major theological themes, the return of Christ was a third concern that received considerable mention in the Apostolic Faith.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53.

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 68.

Seymour like many of his contemporaries had become Pentecostals after exposure to the Methodist and Holiness Movement. The teachings of the Holiness movement were not consistent but one of its central assertions was that the mature Christian life involved two separate stages. Jacobsen (2003) further states, “Conversion represented a first step toward full salvation, while sanctification was understood as a subsequent and second work of grace that completed the “double cure” that human sin required”.¹⁰⁵ Most Holiness believers use the term ‘born again’ to signal this experience and expounds that one should be able to recall the specific time this new birth took place. He further adds that Sanctification was considered an act of cleansing rather than forgiveness and the focus was on the general impulse to sin and not restricted to sin as an act¹⁰⁶. The concept was that sanctification helped the believer to experience a keen sense of God’s presence and thereby experience a declined inclination to sin. Pentecostals consider the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the third dimension in the three-step view of the progression of Christian maturity. The baptism in the Holy Spirit was considered a gift of power to aid the saved and sanctified believer in ministry.

The second theme was focused on identifying the true manifestations of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. William Seymour practiced an understanding of Pentecost which dismantled the barriers of exclusion. While many Pentecostals focused on the issue of tongues, the leaders of Azusa Street maintained a strong emphasis on tongues as the initial sign of the baptism of the spirit, but were very careful to maintain priority on the baptism and not simply the tongues. Seymour believed that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was God’s way of melting all nations and races together into one common family

¹⁰⁵ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 68.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

in the Lord. The Azusa Street mission exercised not only racial inclusion but gender inclusion as well. They believed that the gender barrier had been washed away by the spirit. Jacobsen cites Seymour's Apostolic Faith publication, "'in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female' and therefore it was 'contrary to Scriptures that a woman should not have her part in the salvation work to which God has called her.'"¹⁰⁷ Seymour endorsed equality in Christian marriages and promoted respect regardless of age. The Azusa Mission embraced the notion that God could speak to anyone regardless of age, gender, race or class. Hence the awareness that love rather than tongues was the essential marker of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The third emphasis of the Azusa Mission was on eschatology. Early Pentecostals perceived the birth of the Pentecostal Movement as a precursor to the soon return of Christ for His church. The Pentecostal out-breaking was seen as a divine act as God stirred the humble hearts of believers who longed for a true restoration of holiness within the church. Anderson (2004) states, "The imminent return of Christ was the primary motivation for evangelism and world mission, which was seen essentially not as converting the world to Christ 'evangelism' but as engaging in activity 'evangelization' that would hasten the fulfillment of Christ in Mathew 24:14"¹⁰⁸ Early Pentecostals had a pre-millennial and dispensational view of eschatology which fueled the urgency of their evangelism. The belief in the imminent return of Christ cast a shadow over all their activities causing these humble believers to forsake earthly possession and personal safety to travel abroad with the gospel of salvation. Land (2003) points out that 'upward

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 79.

¹⁰⁸ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 218.

social mobility' is clearly affecting the apocalyptic fervor and urgency as the world looks a little better to contemporary, more affluent North American Pentecostals, and that the eschatological hope and enthusiasm to witness is found more nearly in its pristine state among the burgeoning Third world Pentecostals.¹⁰⁹

The spread of the global Pentecostal movement while fueled by a strong eschatological motif was carried out by a vast number of ordinary people who embraced the call for world evangelization. Pentecostal theology teaches that every member is a soul winner. Evangelism in Pentecostal thought means to go out and to convert the lost (unbelievers) for Christ in the power of the Spirit. Although increased institutionalization has caused a resurgence of clergy/laity divide, the theologically trained clergy was not the priority. Pentecostalism created an opportunity for ordinary people to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit.

Church of God and Race Relations

Joseph E. Jackson in *Reclaiming Our Heritage* (1993) records that Blacks have been active in the Church of God since 1909 when Edmund S. Barr, a Black native of the Bahamas, was saved in a Florida camp meeting.¹¹⁰ After being baptized with the Holy Spirit, he returned to his homeland to spread the Pentecostal gospel. He was later joined by R. M. Evans, a white retired Methodist minister. For many years, the denomination credited R. M. Evans as the first missionary of the organization. It was not until 1992 when Dr. R. Lamar Vest, then General Overseer of the Church of God, finally

¹⁰⁹ Steve J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (New York, New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 71.

¹¹⁰ Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993), 33.

acknowledged Barr as the first missionary of the Church of God.¹¹¹ With Evans joining Barr in the Bahamas, they were able to provide an interracial ministry on the Church of God's first mission field. This partnership was not without challenges as these men had to contend with the racial attitudes within and outside of the church. Under the leadership of A. J. Tomlinson the Church of God embraced the growing number of Blacks who found salvation and joined the denomination. Conn (1996) reports,

The first official register of ministers, in the January 1913 General Assembly Minutes included eleven Black ministers without any mention of race. In November of the same year, the minutes of the 9th annual Assembly listed at least twelve clearly distinguishable Black ministers. The name of each of these ministers was followed by a capitalized "C", a designation for "colored". This was a reflection of the practice at the time and the reports of colored ministers were stamped with a red star to identify their racial distinction.¹¹²

Conn (1996) noted that the Black work was under the supervision of the white state overseers until the assembly of 1915 when Edmond S. Barr was appointed overseer of the Black work.¹¹³ The Black churches were placed under white supervision two years later and no further efforts were made to put the churches under separate overseers until 1922. Over several years the Colored churches experienced tremendous growth in Florida as well as other states. In 1919, Thomas J. Richardson was appointed overseer of the Colored work but he served less than a year due to the result of the changes which took place at the 17th General Assembly (1922) when major discord arose between Tomlinson and his followers and the group that remained to be Church of God.¹¹⁴ Jackson further noted that during the 18th General Assembly held in Cleveland

¹¹¹ Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993), 33.

¹¹² Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God. Definitive Edition* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 1996), 150.

¹¹³ Ibid, 252.

¹¹⁴ Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993), 38.

Tennessee, in 1923, David La Fleur was appointed to supervise the Colored work. Under La Fleur's leadership, the Colored churches began to have their own General Assemblies and this continued for many years until the re-amalgamation of the Colored and white churches in 1964.¹¹⁵ In 1928 David La Fleur submitted his resignation to the General Overseer on account of accusations involving his wife. The following year John H. Curry was appointed his successor at the 23rd General Assembly in 1929.¹¹⁶ Curry was succeeded by W. L. Ford in 1946 followed by the appointment of George A. Wallace in 1949. In 1958, Ford was reappointed. The Colored work was then placed under J. T. Wallace, a white minister and in 1965 David L. Lemons. Jackson stated further, "Because of the denomination's resolution on human rights in 1966, the need for the Colored work to exist as a separate entity was no longer seen as viable and the position of overseer was therefore, no longer necessary."¹¹⁷ In 1966 the two separate General Assemblies were discontinued with the exception of the state of Florida which continues to host two state conventions. The Black churches were placed under the jurisdiction of the white overseer of their respective states.

According to Jackson (1993), a resolution passed in 1978 by the executive committee of the Church of God created a position of South Eastern Regional Evangelism Director overseeing the Blacks.¹¹⁸ Bishop Wallace Sibley Sr. was appointed in this position with the responsibility of promoting evangelism in the Southern states. In 1982 Bishop Sibley was replaced by Bishop C. C. Pratt who served until 1992. In 1983 the title of the position was changed to Evangelism Director and at the General Assembly

¹¹⁵ Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993), 39.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 43.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 44.

of 1992, Bishop Joseph E. Jackson was appointed and the name of the position changed to Director of Black Ministries. Bishop Jackson was followed by Bishop Aubrey Sellers who was then followed by Bishop Campbell. It is a well known undocumented fact that the department of Black Ministries in the Church of God has no legislative power to impact the overall denomination, does not have a budget and in no substantive way empowers the Black church. The director functions as an evangelist and attempts to improve the morale of the Black church by means of a bi-annual convention.

Although just under a million Church of God members reside in the United States and Canada¹¹⁹, the executive leadership of the denomination has remained in the hands of Southern white males. The State of Florida remains segregated by racial division and it is the only state with three Executive State Offices. The state office located in Cocoa, Florida provides leadership to the predominantly Black congregations and the office located in Tampa provides oversight to the predominantly white congregations of the state with the exemption of a few immigrant minority congregations. The third office provides oversight to the Hispanic churches in the state. To date there are only two Black State overseers in the USA (Cocoa, Florida and Southern New England) and one overseer of Indian descent (New York). Similarly there are only two Black State Youth and Christian Education Directors (Cocoa, Florida and New York) and one Youth Director of Indian descent (Southern New England).

Cultural Inclusion Challenge for Church of God of East Flatbush

The church of God of East Flatbush can garner much about cultural inclusion from the biblical and modern day Pentecostal movement. Pentecostal theology is

¹¹⁹ <http://www.churchofgod.org>

intrinsically multicultural in nature and praxis. To be Pentecostal is more than embracing the right doctrine and an eschatological awareness. It calls for an inclusive attitude which embraces the poor and marginalized. There is the danger however that as more Pentecostals join the ranks of the economically affluent, there is a reduced urgency towards the end times. As people who have suffered the scorn and rejection of traditional religious groups, Pentecostals must confront the tendency to become exclusive as we attempt to carve out a safe space. This tendency towards isolation could have emerged out of the fear of rejection, and in turn has colored the congregation's attitude to other religions as well as other ethnic and racial groups.

As a racial minority congregation, members of the Church of God of East Flatbush have learnt to survive racism within society as well as their own denomination. As nationals of a country that has been under colonial rule for many years, Jamaicans have learned to become self reliant. This ability to cope with life's stresses without the need to lean on others have been celebrated within the culture to the point that pride sometimes cripples the needy in requesting help. This need to be in control of one's environment makes it necessary to avoid the new and unfamiliar territories. Many Jamaican members of the Church of God of East Flatbush have found their identity within the ecclesiastical structure of their faith group and it has only been in recent years that their children have been released into leadership within the church. By maintaining a rigid Jamaican structure, although residing in New York City, has also resulted in the loss of many youths within the congregation who migrated to America as children or American born.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Church of God Archives

In order for the congregation to move forward in a progressive, inclusive and healthy way, there is a need for ongoing dialogue among the Jamaican and non-Jamaican members to explore opportunities to integrate all cultures into the leadership structure where needed. The Apostles in Act chapter six recognized that by expanding the leadership of the early church, they could focus on their primary responsibilities of studying and preaching while expanding the leadership to become multicultural. New York City is the largest city in the United States and probably the most diverse. In order to effectively evangelize the city the Church of God of East Flatbush will require a ministry praxis which affirms the culture of individuals while being open to share the ministry leadership. To deny non-Jamaicans a place in leadership ultimately counteracts the very doctrine we embrace so closely.

Conclusion

Pentecostal theology is inherently inclusive in its nature. This inclusivity transcends race, culture and gender. Although the Church of God Denomination continues to deny female clergy equality with their male counterparts, their significance in the denomination have been proven times and times again. The denomination has continued to tolerate such arguments such as “all the disciples were males” and “women should be silent in the church” as the rationale for justifying this inequity. The fact that the Bible also states that “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male or female, bond or free” is ignored during this debate.

Black ministers within the Church of God Denomination have been crucial to its global expansion, but the minor presence of Blacks in leadership in the Church of God in

America reflects the denomination's ambivalence towards the issue of race. While cajoling the Black Church of God constituency in America of the great concern held by the denominational leadership, we have witnessed a gradual but steady reduction in the effort to recruit and appoint more Blacks in leadership. At the General Assembly of 2004 we celebrated the election of the first Black individual to the position of Director of Evangelism and there was a motion to panel a committee to explore ways to increase the presence of visible minorities in leadership. Two year later there was no report of the work of the committee and all efforts to gain such report met with merely a promise of a future feedback. Since then there has been further reduction in visible minority presence in leadership. In dialoguing with a senior executive in the Church of God concerning the sparse minority presence it was met with the response that "the minorities were not voting each other into positions because they all wanted to be elected themselves." Further inquiries were that since the denomination's stated commitment to increasing visible minorities was not improved by the voting process, why were they not appointing more minorities to the positions that were filled by appointments rather than the electoral process? The response was "Things are not where they should be, but Blacks are doing better today than they had done in the past."

The denominational leadership has reflected a narrow racial and cultural grouping which has maintained a Southern white ethos. In many ways the denomination still operates as an American church with an international Missions program. Due to the fact that the American church has greatly financed the denominational operations, it is likely to continue in this vein for quite a while. Most of the Black leaders serving on various important Boards within the denomination are immigrants who were members of the

Church of God prior to migrating to America. The alarming absence of efforts to reach out to the Black American community testifies to the low priority of growing cross-culturally.

The Church of God of East Flatbush has mirrored the ministry praxis of its denomination in that it has functioned as a Jamaican family church which tolerated the “Others” who were nationally and culturally distant. Those who were fortunate to embrace the Jamaican culture and win the approval of the core membership somehow found a place, while others including the second and third generation of Jamaican-born parents floated with the crowd or moved unto other churches. It is clear that the local congregation did not reflect critically on how the majority culture while catering to it’s self may have handicapped its outreach to the community.¹²¹ Therefore a critical appraisal of Pentecostal theology by the local congregation as well as the denomination would help to identify barriers visible and invisible and explore ways to ensure that our theology is lived out in our embrace of those whom the Spirit will draw to Christ. It is imperative that the church of God of East Flatbush not continue to perpetrate cultural exclusion but embrace other cultures as an extension of the family formed in Christ

¹²¹ Fishbowl (see appendices).

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

Congregational life does not exist in a vacuum and a valid congregational study must incorporate the sociological dimension of the organization and its doctrine. It is important to address the sociological factors impacting congregations and the immigrant congregation in particular. In this chapter we will seek to examine the sociological factors affecting immigrant congregations as they struggle to maintain spirituality while simultaneously holding to cultural mores. According to the latest United States Census Bureau, the United States has experienced significant influx of immigrants from the nations of the world exceeding the previous peak migration years from 1880s to World War 1.¹²² The country has undergone significant demographical changes in cultural diversity and population growth with the more recent massive arrival of Latinos and Asians. The new immigrants have added to the linguistic and cultural landscape of communities throughout the United States. They have also widened the religious diversity of communities and as a result the religions of immigrants have become a major object of academic study. A number of sociologist and anthropologists now recognize and propose that religious institutions frequently lie at the center of immigrant social networks.

Human migration is not a new occurrence and has existed throughout civilization. (Lee, 1966: Petersen 1958: Smith 2000). Migration is defined by Lee (1966) as involving

¹²² <http://www.census.gov>.

a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence incorporating both voluntary and involuntary acts, an origin and a destination and an intervening set of obstacles¹²³. Levine (1987) notes that human exodus has been a permanent theme throughout history. Petersen (1958) proposes a typology of migration which he organized into four categories: primitive, forced or impelled, free and mass migration. Primitive migration results from an ecological push ensuing from the inability to cope with such natural forces as fire, floods or drought. Forced or impelled migration involves movements that are involuntary and influenced by governmental or societal actions. Free migration is left to the sole will of the individual to move as they seek new experiences or improved quality of life. Finally mass migration involves large number of people motivated by those who pioneered free migration.¹²⁴ Lee's theory of immigration incorporates the push and pull factors. Push factors involve motives for emigration such as religious as well as political persecution, oppression, natural disaster or refugee flow from dictatorships. Pull factors involve economic, educational, retirement and the hope of a better life.¹²⁵ Ravenstein proposed six laws of migration during the time frame of 1834 to 1913.¹²⁶ The laws are as follows; (1) Most migrants travel short distances and with increasing distance the number of migrants decrease. (2) Migration occurs in stages and with a wave-like motion. (3) Migration increases in volume as industries and commerce develop and transport improves, and the major direction of movement is from agricultural areas to centers of industry and commerce. (4) Most migrants are adults (5) Women are more migratory than

¹²³ Yung Jung Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 47-57.

¹²⁴ W. Petersen, "A General Typology of Migration", *American Sociological Review*, 1958, 256-266.

¹²⁵ S.E. Lee, "A theory of Migration, Demography 3" 1966, 47-57.

¹²⁶ <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

men within their country of birth but men more frequently venture beyond it. (6) Urban dwellers are less likely to move than their rural counterparts.¹²⁷

Immigrants experience certain barriers unique to a dislocated population. Separated from family, friends, a supportive network and a familiar culture, immigrants venture out into a new world with many uncertainties. Some arrive to the welcome of family or friends and others are thrust into a world of strangers. They must find a place to live and a job to support themselves and in some cases also support their families back in the home country. They might be required to learn a new language, new cultural norms and confront certain exclusionary behaviors towards them from the host residents.

Jamaica has long enjoyed a history of immigration to the United States. The documented history of Black emigration from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands into what is now the United States dates back to 1619 when 20 voluntary indentured workers arrived in Jamestown, Virginia on a Dutch frigate.¹²⁸ Jamaica served as a major clearing house for slaves en route to North America. The fact that Jamaica was a colony of Great Britain made it a fruitful source for recruiting to meet the labor shortage in the increasing sugar industry. Jamaicans were recruited to work in Panama and Costa Rica in the 1850s and when slavery in the United States was abolished in 1865 American planters imported temporary workers to harvest crops on an annual basis.¹²⁹ The flow of Jamaican immigrants to the United States continued steadily in response to changing immigration regulations. In bemoaning the brain-drain of the country over the years, Brenda Wyss cites an IMF report which estimates that more than 60% of all Jamaicans with tertiary

¹²⁷ <http://www.harpercollege.edu>.

¹²⁸ <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

education have migrated to the US.¹³⁰ Economic opportunities abroad and the opportunities for educational advancement have induced a vast number of Jamaicans to migrate to the United States. This exodus has also been nourished by an out of control crime rate which preys on returning immigrants who are socially dislocated by many years of residing abroad.

Jamaican Migration to New York

A keen study of New York City's religious history exhibits a journey interspersed with the presence of immigrants. Each flow of immigrants brought its own cultural and religious customs and traditions. Carnes and Karpathakis (2001) notes from NYC Department of city planning, that New York City is the most ethnically diverse place on the globe with over 196 nationalities that passed through the city schools and more than 56% of the city's population are foreign born or the children of foreign born.¹³¹ They noted that the Dutch were the first immigrants to New York who brought their Dutch Reformed Protestantism followed by the English and German Protestants along with a few Jews.¹³² During the nineteen century, a large wave of Roman Catholic Germans, Irish and Italians arrived, followed by another large wave of both Buddhist Chinese and Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. African American Protestants migrated to New York City in large numbers starting during World War 1. Then "la magracion" of Puerto Ricans during and right after world War 11 brought Hispanics

¹³⁰ Brenda Wyss, CPE Staff Economist, Econ-Atrocity: Global Poaching – Jamaica's Brain Drain, Jan.30, 2004.

¹³¹ Tony Carnes and Anna Karpathakis, *New York Glory: Religions in the City* (New York, New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 14.

¹³² Ibid, 13.

religions to New York City.¹³³ The 1990 United States Census Bureau conveyed the racial and ethnic diversity of New York City's five boroughs when it indicated that 52 percent of the population was white, 29 percent was Black and 7 percent was Asian. A fairly large group, 12 percent, listed another ethnic/ racial origin. About 24 percent identified themselves as Hispanic in origin. In the New York City area, just over half of the population is white (54%), about a third is Black (37%), and the remainder would not or could not identify themselves by the Black-white racial classification. Three groups (Catholics, Jewish and Lutheran) are predominantly white and ten groups are predominantly Black. Most of the Baptist (89.5%) and the Pentecostals (93.9%) are Black.¹³⁴

The Church of God denomination has maintained a strong presence in the city through the loose association of ethnic congregations scattered across its landscape. There is a State Office in Farmingdale, Long Island which provides leadership for the English speaking and Haitian congregations across New York State. The Hispanic North East Region offices located in Pennsylvania provides oversight for all the Hispanic congregations in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania and there are several Indian congregations which report neither to the English nor Hispanic offices but directly to headquarters. In a verbal report given by a senior executive of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, it was stated that the Church of God congregations in Metro New York alone, constituted the second largest concentration of Church of God membership in the United States, next to Charleston, North Carolina.

¹³³ Ibid, 14.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 32.

During the 1960s wave of Jamaican immigrants into New York City, some of these immigrants were Pentecostal lay people who held membership with the Church of God in Jamaica. Although the Church of God, Cleveland Tennessee has been deeply rooted in the Southern region of the United States, early missions efforts had established a thriving presence in Jamaica. In spite of the fact that for many years the denominational overseer of the island was a white American, the Jamaican Church of God organization developed and maintained a very strong Jamaican ethos from its infancy. The early Jamaican pioneers gave their blood and sweat towards the building of the work and there was a marked sense of ownership by the Jamaican members.

Upon arriving in New York City these Jamaican immigrants began looking for a Church of God congregation which reflected their heritage and when they could not find such, they resorted to attending other Black Pentecostal churches. As they encountered more and more of their Jamaican Church of God colleagues, they would reminisce on the days in Jamaica when church was a central part of their existence. Eventually a group began to meet and word began to spread that they were starting a Church of God congregation in Brooklyn which would become an extension of their Jamaican heritage. When they heard that Rev. Guy Notice, a prominent Jamaican pastor was studying in North Dakota, they petitioned him to move to Brooklyn to pastor the small congregation and in 1970 the church of God of East Flatbush was formally organized with thirteen members.

Like most immigrant congregations in the United States, the members of the Church of God of East Flatbush assumed full responsibility for the support and operation of the congregation. They made numerous calls and contacts with new arrivals from

Jamaica and the church flourished. Within a few years the congregation relocated several times and in 1974 purchased a Jewish synagogue where they presently meet for worship. The new group assumed a congregational structure of self reliance and sacrificed to see the entity become self-sustaining as noted by Ebaugh et al congregational model. “The congregational model places emphasis upon voluntary membership, lay involvement in decision making, a professional clergy, declining significance of denomination and financial support from its members”¹³⁵. One of the reasons they cited why immigrant congregations tended to be congregational in structure is because they are usually founded by the immigrants themselves who devote the time and money to make them a reality.¹³⁶

The members of the Church of God of East Flatbush like most immigrant congregations sought to take ownership of the religious center and remain a vital part of the congregation’s operation. On the other hand however, there was a great need to be accepted by the denominational parent body in America. Surrounded by so many pastor/founder’s congregations in Brooklyn, there was an avid aversion to becoming an independent entity. Belonging to an established denomination was a sign of legitimacy and although there was a solid undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the denomination especially on the matter of race, members would remain polite and hospitable to the white denominational representatives.

As immigrants coming from the Third World living in the United States, with a legacy of colonialism, the members related to the white American denominational leadership in a way akin to their former colonializers. Segovia and Talbert notes, “Given

¹³⁵ Helen R. Ebaugh and Janet Chafetz Saltzman , Structural Adaptation in Immigrant Congregations, 136, *Journal for Sociology of Religion*, (Summer 2000), 135-154.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 141.

the traditional relationship between colonializers and colonialized – a relationship profoundly marked by a set of binary oppositions grounded in those of center/ margins and civilization/ primitivism – such a reality is global and comprehensive”¹³⁷ As immigrants the new congregation knew they were on the margins and their goal was to move towards the center. Coming from a country where they were the racial and cultural center, the members of the Church of God of East Flatbush assumed full ownership of their ministry. While most new congregations remained under the status of a “mission” for a few years, the Church of God of East Flatbush quickly assumed the status of a fully operational congregation which included monthly reporting and tithing to the headquarters as well as contributing mission funds to support world evangelization. Rallies became a major annual fundraiser and the membership would be divided into teams with the winning team being announced during the service of ingathering. This event was marked with intense, yet friendly competition as some leaders gave their full salary towards the rally so as not to be outdone by their rivals. This friendly competition among themselves eventually spilled over to their relationships with other church of God congregations and soon they became the leading financial contributor in the State of New York.

Eager to find a place of belonging, the congregation made every effort to prove faithful and obedient to the regulations of the parent body. This quest for legitimacy resulted in the classic pattern of the colonialized – passivity, submission and obedience. This passive submission to the denomination was challenged further by the younger more educated members who themselves felt dominated by the older generation and they

¹³⁷ Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Talbert, “Reading From This Place, Vol.1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States.” (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 61.

could not understand why their leaders were not challenging the gender and race discrimination practiced so openly within the denomination. Instead the older generation continued to suppress their resistance underneath the surface image of the friendly and hospitable colonialized with the hope of engendering change within the attitude of their white denominational leaders by demonstrating what they perceived to be godly submission. While many of the younger generation challenged the blind submission of their elders to a system which promised equity but practiced racial and gender inequity, there was the expectation that by maintaining a submissive spirit, God would elevate to leadership godly individuals who would lead the denomination into an equitable future.

Culture and Liturgy

Church of God of East Flatbush maintained a strong Jamaican ethos throughout its entire operation. Every effort was made to establish the new congregation as a Jamaican transplant. This effort was made to provide continuity to the Jamaican religious experience and to soften the difficulty of adjusting to a new society. While this structure may not have been a conscious construct, the fact remained that the members wanted their present church life to reflect that which they hungered for upon arrival in New York.

Culture is defined by the American Heritage Science Dictionary (2002) as the sum of attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted through language, material objects, rituals, institutions and art from one generation to the next.¹³⁸ Merriam-Webster's Medical dictionary also defines culture as the integrated patterns of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, and

¹³⁸Culture. Dictionary.com. The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/culture> (Access: Feb. 18, 2008).

artifacts and depends upon the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. It is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.¹³⁹ One of the prominent mediums of cultural preservation in any society is the area of religion. In many cases religion gives credibility to culture by infusing a divine fiat. In the Jamaican Church of God culture for example some women are required to wear head covering during worship while others forbid the males to worship with their heads covered. Some women are forbidden to wearing trousers while others impose it on the grounds of modesty. Immigrant congregations are prone to transporting a form of religion with a deep measure of culture expressions.

Over the course of this demonstration project (focus groups discussion, fish bowls, and Urban Realities) it was a frequent experience to hear youths of immigrants express their difficulty adjusting to the religious and cultural expressions of their parents. Many American born youths to Jamaican parents find it difficult relating to much of what the church presented in terms of its worship, liturgy and traditions. Although the authority and sacredness of Christ's church is not up for debate, it is necessary that within the congregation the presentation of the ministry should be subject to healthy and timely analysis. Biblical doctrines can be greatly strengthened by structured dialogue and effective teaching. Where church teaching however is presented in a dogmatic fashion the truth is often doubted. When debates are held to clarify moral, ethical or theological issues, leaders quite often resorted to the defensive and terminated essential inquiries with unrelated or misquoted Scriptures. A common quotation was "We should not

¹³⁹ Dictionary.com. Merriam-Webster's Medical dictionary. Merriam-Webster,inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse-culture>. (Access:Feb.18,2008).

remove the old landmark”.¹⁴⁰ The term “landmark” was applied indiscriminately to any held belief whether grounded in culture or theology.

The struggle for identity among immigrants in America continues to be an understandable quest for the human dignity due each individual. Black Americans however continue to bear the scars of a caste system which traps them in a permanent position of marginalization. Jung Young Lee in *Marginality the Key to Multicultural Theology* speaks of the difficulty that non-black has in comprehending the severity of struggles of discrimination, dehumanization, rejection, and shame that the African Americans have experienced for many years.¹⁴¹ While European, Hispanic or Asian immigrants seem to blend in easier with the American society within a couple of generations, Black Americans remain the permanent underclass of this society. As a result “Black” immigrants sometimes retain the identity of their former countries in order to distinguish themselves from the stigma plagued Black American community. According to Smith in her dissertation as she focused on the attitude of parents of *English-Speaking Caribbean Adolescent* and their responses to the American culture notes “When the affluent migrate, they attempt to maintain many of the customs of their homeland. Parents work diligently to keep their children insulated against what they perceive as looseness (early dating, absence of corporal punishment, etc.) of the

¹⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 19:14 (ref. is to thy neighbor’s landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance).

¹⁴¹ Yung Jung Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 26-27.

American society.”¹⁴² Some “Black” immigrants have reported preferential treatment by whites because they knew they were foreigners rather than Black American.

The issue of ethnic among ethnics becomes an important one when other immigrants attempt to find a religious home within a dominant minority context. In an interview with the only non-Jamaican to be elected to the Church of God of East Flatbush deacons’ board prior to 2005, the subject of his experience as a member of the congregation and why he stayed for over 20 years ensued. He reported that while driving by the church he saw the Church of God denominational logo and decided to visit with his wife. He noted that on their first visit, no one spoke to them and they were left standing in front of the building while others drove off without offering a ride. They decided to stay because they did not want to be a part of a pastor/ founder independent congregation. He believed he was eventually voted in as a member of the deacon’s board because after continuing to attend for many years, the people began to think he was Jamaican. Since immigrant congregations tend to invest great energy in retaining the culture of the old country, it could be surmised that the survival of the majority culture depends on the suppression of other cultures within the congregation. Therefore it was not exceptional that members from other countries at times chose to remain and adapt to the Jamaican culture at the expense of their own. Church fellowships or socials became a relaxed environment to pass Jamaican folklore and cuisine to the next generation. Members from other cultures quickly learned to embrace and celebrate the Jamaican culture and cuisine.

¹⁴² Andria R. Smith, *English-Speaking Caribbean Adolescents: The Psychosocial and Psychological Effect of Migration and Adolescence and their Impact on Adjustment to New York City*. (New York, New York: Bell & Howell, 2000), 26-27.

The history of the Church of God of East Flatbush as a developing body has its roots in Jamaica while existing in America.¹⁴³ For many years, the worship services reflected the format practiced in Jamaica complimented with Jamaican music and a generous supply of Jamaican dialect known as “patois” and frequent references to “back home”. Patois (commonly pronounced as Patwa) is an English/ African based language used primarily in Jamaica and its Diaspora. At its most general level, the Diaspora represents the sum total of all those who presently live, for whatever reason, on a permanent basis in a country other than that of their birth.¹⁴⁴ While many Caribbean immigrants who have lived in close contact with the Jamaican Diaspora may have developed an understanding of the dialect, its common usage created a barrier to non-Jamaicans settling in the congregation. Worship services would last for three or four hours and replete with regular chants of “Praise God” and “Amen”. The atmosphere would be charged with prolong handclapping, tambourines shaking and several members running down the aisles in the “Spirit”. Some of the “old time choruses”, though unscriptural in wording and incorrect in doctrine, would be sung with much passion and enthusiasm. The preachers were frequently from Jamaica and many of their sermons were not fully comprehended by the non-Jamaican and American born youths because of the heavy Jamaican accent and liberal dosages of Jamaican anecdotes.

The Church practiced and promoted a doctrinal position which was grounded on a non-scriptural interpretation of “Holiness” with a boundless emphasis on rules pertaining to outward appearance. The Minutes Book and a very legalistic interpretation of

¹⁴³ Andria Smith, Georgia Forbes, Sharon Carter-Jones, Jacqueline Simms and R.C. Hugh Nelson, *The Urban Center Model*. New York, New York, 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Fernando F. Segovia, and Mary Ann Talbert, “Reading From This Place, Vol.1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States.” (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 60.

Scriptures governed the existence of the congregation.¹⁴⁵ Due to the close knitted nature of the congregation, the personal boundaries of the membership was extremely limited by the over involvement and engagement of the core membership in each others lives. The church leadership monitored a great portion of the lives of the membership. Members were not allowed to wear jewelry and women were discouraged from wearing trousers, sleeveless blouses or tops and mini-skirts. Cosmetics were restricted to a minimal usage and Jezebel was lifted as the epitome of exorbitant make-up. One of the younger first generation leaders explained her rationale for wearing earrings after she got married seventeen years ago. Against the will of her parents and other elders, she felt she was married and they could not provide scriptural basis for not wearing a simple earring. Eventually the practice was accepted and embraced by other members of the congregation. Attempts to enforce certain dress codes were met with resistance by the younger members who witnessed a greater degree of liberty exercised by their American counterparts. When they attended the General Assembly they would be surrounded by thousands of other Church of God members and some would be wearing the very accessories restricted by their local churches. When they would question their elders about the double standard, there would be the rationale that “white folks” did not have to live by the same pattern. This would be explained in a manner that ascribed a superior level of spirituality to the Jamaican interpretation of godliness.

When I became aware of this dynamic in the congregation I was reminded of a conversation I had with my own grandmother as a child in Jamaica. I inquired of her as to

¹⁴⁵ The Book of Minutes is the document which regulates the operation of the Church of God. It is published every two years for distribution at the General Assembly of the Church of God and contains the services and business sessions of the Assembly, the doctrine and polity of the denomination, Resolutions, the Leadership Directory and Statistical and Financial Report.

why she was so adamant that women should not wear jewelry and she would always reply that it was against Scripture. However I knew she loved Oral Roberts and his ministry. One day I came upon a copy of Abundant Life, a publication by Oral Robert Ministries with a picture of Oral Roberts and his wife. When I realized that Mrs. Roberts was wearing a lovely pearl necklace around her neck, I brought the copy to my grandmother and asked her to explain why it was acceptable for Mrs. Evelyn Roberts to wear a necklace but not a woman in Jamaica who served the same God. Her response was, “Oh they are white people”. This anecdote mirrors the sentiments of racial double standards expressed by many youths who grew up in the Church of God of East Flatbush.

A cardinal sin among the Church of God church culture was unwed pregnancy. If one served in a position of leadership and had a child who became pregnant out of wedlock, it was possible for that individual to be encouraged to resign his or her position. This practice placed tremendous public pressure on families who were forced to bear the burden of guilt of their children’s indiscretions. This propensity to corporate self monitoring restricted the individual freedom of members and encouraged group fusion.

Prayer meetings were held regularly at the church and all night prayer vigils were held quite frequently. Members and visitors would attend the prayer vigils and request divine intervention for matters pertaining to employment, immigration applications, health, family etc. The testimony reports were especially exciting as reports were given of positive results in answer to prayer. After Rev. Peter Gayle’s wife became ill with cancer, a group of about seven women devoted themselves to intense prayer and fasting and would have multiple days shut-ins in the church building. Again requests for prayer would be submitted and there was a consciousness that the ongoing revival at the church

was the result of intensive prayer emphasis. The devotion of these women could have been possible only with the ardent support of their husbands and children who supported the prayer emphasis from behind the scenes.

Music occupied a major portion of church life with several choirs performing on a regular basis. In time the congregation distinguished itself with a choir of one hundred voices which traveled nationally and internationally. The traveling choir did live performances as well as recorded in the studio. Christmas pageants became major attractions to the church and furthered the fame of the congregation. As parents brought their children into the country, the music program was immediately promoted as a deterrent to getting in trouble with the law. Church activities were promoted as a positive instrument to raise well behaved young men and women. The choir director who also served as youth director encouraged this philosophy and students were expected to produce their school reports for review in order to remain in the choir. Several testimonials by former members of the choir whose parents did not attend church at all confirm this position. There were several celebratory events which were also major draws such as Young Ladies Ministry and Young Men For Christ anniversary. These events allowed the youths to showcase their talents and appeal to other youths to find their place in the church.

Inter-generational Conflict

David Stevens cites the works of Goette and Mullins on the evolution of ethnic churches in that they contend such changes are indicative of the process by which immigrant ethnic churches become more assimilated over time, moving from mono-

lingual churches where services are conducted in the immigrant's home language to bi-lingual or mono-lingual churches where English predominates and ascribing these changes to conflicts between first and second generation congregants.¹⁴⁶ He remarks on Mullins three-stage model, where a strong first generation leadership establishes an ethnic church in response to their cultural and linguistic differences, as well as discrimination faced in other churches.¹⁴⁷ As later generations culturally assimilate, churches enter the second stage, where congregations experience a shift in language and introduce English language services and bilingual ministers.¹⁴⁸ The third stage is brought about as subsequent generations become more structurally assimilated and enter into the cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society.¹⁴⁹ As this process evolves the attraction of ethnic churches gradually diminishes and the church is transformed into a multi-ethnic, English-speaking congregation.

While the Church of God of East Flatbush congregation has been in existence for thirty seven years, it has only been since the past eight years that the congregation has embraced into leadership those who migrated to America as children. The deacon's board of twelve male members continued to be re-elected with a few exceptions until a term limitation was instituted and applied two years ago. While the board had discussed and agreed on the necessity of term limitations years ago, it was only instituted in 2005. Most departments were led on a long term basis by first generation members and upon relinquishing the positions, appointed their successors. The appointments of leaders were

¹⁴⁶ David W. Stevens, *Spreading the Word: Religious Beliefs and the Evolution of immigrant Congregations*, *Journal for the Sociology of Religion*, p.122 (Summer 2004) pp.121-138.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 122

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 122

influenced by important laypersons and while the pastor had the final approval, the process was laity-led.

Like many immigrant congregations, the first generation children of the Church of God of East Flatbush were strongly encouraged to advance educationally at great sacrifices by the parents. With the congregation assuming full responsibility for its children, other members would assist financially to see the youths pursue college. Yet upon returning to the congregation as married, educated professionals, they would still be referred to as youths or children and regardless of their professional responsibilities, there was a persistent lack of trust in the abilities of these young professionals. There was a subtle push to see these young people marry each other and begin families and those outside the circles of the mainstay were viewed as distractions to lead the young people away from God and the church. In discussions with several younger ministry leaders there was a tendency to refer to them as the second generation when in essence they are still first generation in that they migrated from Jamaica as children.¹⁵⁰ While the ministry leadership now operates on a two year appointment system by the Bishop and the four pastors, with every effort to incorporate the second generation, the leadership remains over 90% Jamaican born. The reality is that the younger first generation has just recently been released into ministry leadership.

During Rev. Peter Gayle's tenure several church meetings were called with parents and youths to discuss the generational conflict which threatened the harmony of the congregation. It is reported that several meetings became quite heated and when it was perceived by the older members that the pastor was sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the youths, he was accused of siding with the young people. Feeling

¹⁵⁰ The manual

disrespected by their elders many of the young educated members became disrespectful towards them in return, but continued to respect their pastor as a father. Even after a few younger men had been elected to the deacons board, they were referred to as junior deacons in comparison to the senior deacons. When Rev. Peter Gayle retired, the senior deacons were instrumental in finding his replacement in Rev. Lindsay Arscott, a Jamaican minister who functioned as president of the Bethel Bible College in Jamaica. When Rev. Arscott died the younger first generation began to exert more involvement by challenging the status quo and requesting audience with the denominational representative for New York State.

The goal of ethnic congregations is to provide a safe and comfortable social space for new immigrants and this becomes less relevant once an immigrant community has a significantly assimilated second and third generation into the host society.¹⁵¹ As the second generation members become acculturated into the host society, ethnic congregations face a challenge of relevancy and if this transformation is not navigated well, the church could become stagnant and die. Church of God of East Flatbush has suffered the silent exodus of college graduates who never returned to the congregation, senior members who relocated because of climate or employment and those who retired south or returned to Jamaica. In essence the generational conflict observed and discussed in various forums seems to rest between the senior first generation and their children, also first generation, as they struggled to find significance in their religious home.

Evangelism Methodology

¹⁵¹ Helen R. Ebaugh and Janet Chafetz Saltzman, Structural Adaptations in Immigrant congregations, *Journal of the Sociology of Religion*, Vol.61, No.2 (Summer 2000), 145.

Evangelism was carried out in an informal system of word of mouth. New Jamaican immigrants were contacted and often assisted in finding residence as well as employment. Many times new arrivals were given the name and telephone number of the Church of God of East Flatbush by their pastors back in Jamaica and they quickly settled into the congregation. The church became a ready family for new Jamaican arrivals who recognized that the church provided adequate cultural and social support in their transition to New York.

A strong outreach program to children and youths made it necessary to have several busses making multiple trips to transport children on Sundays to church. At one point the bus ministry had six fifteen-seat buses operating on Sundays making multiple trips. The church developed a strong outreach to youths and provided an alternative to the secular activities in the city. Many parents feared the pull of city life and felt relieved when their children became regular participants in the youth programs. Due to the church's emphasis on education, the younger first generation began to excel quickly in academics. An after-school program was established to ensure that students were able to get help with their homework. Some believe that while the first generation parents competed with raising funds for the church, their children competed in academic pursuits.

The church also held open-air services in front of the building to promote the gospel. There is no way however to measure how this approach impacted the membership since those in the community surrounding the church who knew of its existence, felt that it was a church for Jamaicans. It is the belief that unless an adequate analysis is done on the congregational operation, with the goal of identifying barriers to growth beyond the Jamaican identity, efforts at outreach will be futile.

Ministry Model

In addition to providing a space for immigrants to worship together as a community of faith and often as an ethnic community, immigrant congregations frequently establish community centers that provide many other social, emotional and material resources for their members.¹⁵² Church of God of East Flatbush practiced the community center model of ministry in that apart from providing spiritual services, it sought to meet the various needs unique to recent immigrants. Ebaugh defines the community center model as a place at which, in addition to religious rituals, study and education, the following occur and exist: communal celebration of secular holidays, secular classes, GED, ESL, mundane services for members such as financial planning, emergency financial, food and/or housing aid, counseling, recreational facilities or a community hall for social activities.¹⁵³ In many cases benevolence was coupled with evangelism in such a way that it often became the gateway into church membership. There was a concerted effort to reaching immigrants who were experiencing a crisis and many found spiritual as well as a social covering. Unlike many religious institutions in the countries from which both earlier streams and post 1965 immigrants came, in the United States congregations often become community centers, places where immigrants can socialize with fellow ethnics, reproduce ethnic values and customs, learn civic skills and find assistance with meeting the material needs that arise in the face of resettlement¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵² Ibid., 145.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 135.

Members of the Church of God of East Flatbush would prepare food at their own expense and delivered it to the shelters in deprived neighborhoods on Saturday mornings. While gospel tracts were also distributed, there was not a system in place to follow up with the contacts. The church also provided a GED and after-school program. Members and non-members were regularly assisted in paying their rent and eventually many developed an unhealthy dependency upon the church. While there was no effort to perform a community resource mapping of the neighborhood surrounding the church, there was a sense that the church should be involved in providing these social services.

Proposed Urban Ministry Impact Model

An Urban Ministry Model proposal was designed which describes the 10 year plan of the Church of God of East Flatbush. This model is designed to develop a ministry paradigm which celebrates cultural diversity and functions within the context of an urban setting.

Conclusion

Immigrants are attracted to specifically immigrant religious institutions in large measure because they seek to develop social networks with others who share their native language, customs, experiences and problems.¹⁵⁵ Church of God of East Flatbush stated in its bylaws that it would be a congregation that cared for the community and would provide a Bible Institute and even secure its own cemetery for its members.¹⁵⁶ Although this document was filed away and mostly forgotten, there was an unwritten awareness

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 149

¹⁵⁶ Church archive – By-Laws

that the church had a primary function to meeting the spiritual and social needs of Jamaican immigrants. As long as migration takes place from one country to another, there will always be the need for immigrant religious institutions. The formal and informal mechanism within immigrant congregations provides a cushion to new arrivals struggling with displacement and their faith organizations provides the only continuity from the old country. Church of God of East Flatbush has had its share of undocumented immigrants from its inception and has been a consistent source for financial and housing aid as well as referral service to immigration lawyers. The very characteristic of immigrant congregation eventually forges a ministry model which is foreign to its religious counterparts in the home country.

The rapid growth of the Church of God of East Flatbush over the years has been linked to its availability to new immigrants from Jamaica. By functioning as a community center made it more attractive to new immigrants thus fostering a significant level of commitment by the members and it also allowed for attracting new members. As community centers, religious institutions therefore serve as important sites for both ethnic reproduction and for immigrant adaptation to the new community.¹⁵⁷ For many years the congregation celebrated the new arrivals and because of the consistent large crowd at the services, neglected those who dropped out. The congregation ultimately reached a plateau and began to decline as post 9/11 immigration restrictions reduced immigration into the United States. Long term leaders including the longest serving pastor retired to Florida and a level of anxiety began to settle over the congregation.

With the younger more educated first generation finally settling into positions of leadership, there is a marked trend towards decolonialization and greater liberation. There

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 150.

is a greater awareness that the spiritual formation of their children (the second generation) will require more than an imposed Jamaican version of spirituality and a greater freedom from denominational control. Claiming their voice will require a three-fold critical process of self affirmation. The challenge for this generation of leaders is to manifest the pattern of manifest destiny – self confidence, self expression and self determination. Before one can fully embrace and affirm other cultures he or she must first be willing to affirm him or herself. Thus the process entails, on one hand, an active refusal to be bound by our imposed definitions, with a corresponding commitment to understand, expose and critique such definitions; on the other hand, the process also entails an active determination to offer one's own self-definition, with a corresponding commitment not only to see self-affirmation of others, but also to a critical exchange with such others and their own corresponding self-affirmation.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 66.

CHAPTER 5

Goal Specification and Strategy Development

The first goal was to create change in the consciousness of the congregation in order to foster greater acceptance of others leading to increased insight, sensitivity and growth in ethical and spiritual awareness. The objective was to increase awareness of the different cultures represented within the congregation and the demographical changes within our immediate community of Kings County. This was done through three strategic initiatives. The first strategy was to facilitate three congregational meetings over the span of four months to discuss cultural biases, urban anxiety and review the process of cultural inclusion.

During the congregational meeting on February 18, 2007, the candidate led the congregation in a discussion on urban anxiety and how it could impact the congregation's willingness to engage other cultures. During this meeting there was a presentation by Chaplain Azariah Simms who served in major leadership positions for many years before retiring to Florida and Brother Clifton McIntyre, the longest serving trustee in the history of the organization. Both gentlemen gave a review of the history of the congregation and the opportunities and challenges faced during the years. They both concurred that fear had played a major role in causing the congregation to remain self focus over the years. A pivotal statement made by Chaplain Simms was "Procrastination is the enemy of success". He reported to the congregation that during the past they had discussed ways to incorporate the other nationalities within the church and to grow beyond the Jamaican

identity but they failed to implement any of the strategies discussed. He therefore encouraged the congregation to proceed by faith and to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Perhaps the ideal multicultural church is the synergistic church, totally committed to the multicultural vision. It is the hope of the Church of God of East Flatbush to recognize cultural similarities and differences and to use them to create new integrative solutions to organizational problems that go beyond the individual cultures of any single group on an ongoing basis. Several opportunities were granted the congregation to worship with other congregants from various cultures. These multicultural services exposed the predominantly Jamaican congregation to combined bilingual worship services. The first service was with a Hispanic congregation. The congregation shared songs and testimonials in English and Spanish and the pastor, Rev. Victor Cruz, challenged the congregation to continue to demonstrate the love of Jesus in embracing other ethnics into our hearts and congregation.

The pastoral family appreciation service was also a multicultural affair which included a guest appearance by Dr. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, one of the resources on racial reconciliation. He greeted the congregation and presented his book “United By Faith” to the candidate. There were presentations by Jewish, Haitian and Korean groups. Dr. Dale Irvin, president of New York Theological Seminary challenged the congregation on the essence of multiculturalism in the Body of Christ. Rev. Tyrone Stevenson, a Black American pastor spoke in the final service. There was also a worship service to honor Ghana’s 50th anniversary Rev. Edward Nyarko and several others from the Ghanaian community did a presentation on Ghanaian life and culture.

The second strategy designated the first Sunday and every other Wednesday night of each month (February to May 2007) to congregational training in cultural diversity. The methods used were instructional, guest presentations and open forums in order to facilitate sensitivity and spiritual awareness. Professor Yoon Jo Lee, an Asian professor at Brooklyn College, New York, did a congregational training on cultural inclusion. She explored the dynamics of culture and gave practical steps in building cross cultural relationships. Dr. Grace Cornish, author and professional counselor of Jamaican birth, also did a presentation on The Love Language of the Church. She emphasized the inherent qualities of a church that when practiced well becomes a healthy meeting place for diverse cultures. The key points presented were: show love, walk in the Spirit, build relationship with people by meeting them where they are, get close to God as is humanly possible and remember when you first got saved. In her presentation, she described the terms multicultural and intercultural. She pointed out that they seem to be similar but they are not synonyms. Multicultural speaks of different cultures, national, ethnic, religious groups; all living within the same territory but not necessarily coming into contact with each other. In this context, the first implies inactivity and legalism, while the latter implies a proactive transformation movement. Therefore becoming intercultural implies an ongoing long-term process with various milestones that are measured along the way.

The third strategy was the presentation of four sermons on our Pentecostal theology and ministry. The goal of these presentations was to bring enlightenment, promote dialogue and to increase knowledge on the relationship between Pentecostalism and cross-cultural ministry. The series of sermons on Pentecostal theology and

leadership was presented to the congregation to increase awareness of Pentecostalism and to challenge the audience to embrace Pentecostalism not only in theology but in lifestyle which requires the willingness to embrace the cultural “other”.

The second goal was to train ministry leaders to demonstrate healthy interpersonal behavior, improve group dynamic skills, and improve conflict management skills and problem solving techniques in inter-cultural relations. The objective of this goal was to train ten leaders within the congregation in cross-cultural relations and ministry. The first strategy was to recruit ten individuals representing various ethnic groups to participate in the leadership and ministry review of our congregation. A focus group was assembled of individuals representing a diverse cultural background. There was an effort to invite a wider diversity of individuals to be trained in the leadership class to broaden the scope of leadership participation. This class also served as a forum to generate dialogue on cultural diversity and to solicit suggestions for the process of transformation.

The second strategy was to train at least ten individuals from various cultures in basic organizational leadership competencies to participate in the leadership and ministry of our congregation. We secured the professional services of Blanton Peele, a pastoral counseling agency, located in New York, to provide a series of training.

The third strategy was to empower leaders to train and present ministry opportunities for new members and emerging youth leaders and to revise the liturgy to reflect an increased cultural diversity. Out of the discussions on Pentecostalism and cultural inclusion, the leadership team made a commitment to pursue and reflect cultural diversity in recruiting new leaders. The music team also made a commitment to initiate and pursue diversity in the musical selections for worship and praise. We also committed

to the practice of corporate embrace where members were encouraged to greet at least ten new individuals at the end of service in order to get to know other members and visitors of the congregation. We also recruited into leadership a number of second and third generation Jamaicans and other nationalities to broaden the cultural base. It so happened that the biannual election of the deacon's board came right after the period of this study and out of the congregational forums the necessity of a cultural deacon's board was emphasized and affirmed. As a result of this transformational process the congregation elected the most diverse deacon's board in the history of the Church of God of East Flatbush.

The third goal was to foster a rich culturally diverse atmosphere where participants (clergy and laity) could experience equity and cultural affirmation within the community of faith. This was accomplished by promoting an equitable system whereby cultural diversity was celebrated and affirmed and opportunities provided for full participation in the life and ministry of the congregation.

The first strategy was to implement a strategic leadership goal which encouraged leadership team to embrace the marginalized. Out of this venture, we developed a biweekly ministry to the women's shelter and developed contact with the men's shelter for future ministry support. We also established a weekly children's ministry outreach to a local park in an impoverished neighborhood in Brooklyn.

The second strategy was to establish specialized classes through the Christian Education Department. Classes are designed to train the congregation through small groups and goes for 16 weeks. The topic range from leadership development, how to

study the Bible, spiritual warfare, Chasing Daylight—seize the divine Moment, Financial Credit Recovery, Grief Support and many others.

The third strategy was to create and promote diverse expressions of worship through multicultural worship experiences.

Researcher's Assumptions

The purpose of this study was to examine why the church was trapped by a national identity while attempting to evangelize a diverse population in an urban city. My discussion with several leaders within the congregation led me to believe that there was a genuine desire to impact our community. The matter was further discussed in committees and congregational forums and there was a consensus that we were losing our children spiritually and that we were disconnected from our community. This led to a congregational analysis which confirmed that our ministry praxis was designed to attract only new arrivals from Jamaica. We also recognized that there was a cultural tension within the congregation not only with the non-Jamaican members but also the second generation Jamaican immigrants.

We began to examine our denominational affiliation and recognized that racism had played a significant role in its structure and functioning. A review of the history of The Church of God has left the impression that a racially segregated structure have continued to the present with most of our congregations functioning as homogeneous groups. The fact that the Church of God denomination has been in existence over 100 years and continues to be led by a small group of Southern white American males has caused me to question whether or not our denomination is driven by sociology or our

theology. This awareness led us to ponder whether the racial categorization within our denomination had aided a sociological barrier for our congregation. Historically, our congregation has been a strong participant in events sponsored by the Black Ministries Department of the denomination. We recognized, however that the “Black” or “Jamaican” label was inhibiting our ministry focus and compromising our Pentecostal theology. In order to be true to our conviction as a Pentecostal church and to present an effective ministry in the City of New York we recognize that we needed to broaden our ministry focus and methodology.

The study examined the ability of a congregation to exist beyond the first generation if it fails to engage the culture of its location. A ministry which remains relevant only for first generation immigrants is destined to die a quick death. As more of our pioneering members relocate, retire or expire, the stark reality of sustainability confronted us as a congregation and fueled the urgency for this project. We concluded that a Pentecostal congregation located in an urban setting did not have the luxury of preserving a racial or national identity. It was concluded that in order for the Church of God of East Flatbush to successfully preserve a national and racial identity for almost 40 years of existence, barriers must have been created to insulate it from outsiders.

This study was a step of faith in pursuing a purposeful model which would contextualize our ministry. It was the hope of the researcher and the congregational leadership that by adopting a ministry model that is relevant for the urban context of New York City, we will create a new identity of cultural inclusion. The leadership of the church designed a ten-year plan known as Operation Urban Impact (see appendix) to assist the congregation in transitioning from a first generation Jamaican congregation to

become a vibrant Urban Ministry. This study aided the researcher and the congregation in examining our ministry methodology and to develop tools to transition the congregation from isolation to inclusion.

Interviews

One of the individuals interviewed for this project was Curtiss Paul De Young, an associate professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel College, St. Paul, MN and an ordained minister in the Church of God (Anderson, IN). As a white American clergy with a passion and conviction for racial reconciliation, Dr. De Young was a refreshing voice in affirming the call of the church to transcend racial barriers. His brief experience as a pastor in a cross cultural congregation was insightful as he shared his personal struggle with navigating the dynamics of power as a formally white congregation transitioned into a multicultural community of faith. As Dr. De Young shared the struggles in guiding this congregation, he helped me in identifying overt and covert push backs and suggested ways to respond as a leader of change.

The next interview was with Dr. George Yancey, associate professor of sociology at the University of North Texas, specializing in race/ethnicity and biracial families. Dr. Yancey provided me with some practical tools in leading a church through the transition of cultural inclusion. His seven general principles for building multiracial churches were extremely resourceful and relevant. His caution on building multiracial churches as a healthy outgrowth of the mission of the church and not merely to be multiracial was a sobering reminder that the mission of the church is more important than the makeup of the church.

I sat in a session with Rev. A. R. Bernard, founder and CEO of the Christian Cultural Center (CCC), a 28,000 member church located in New York City. Dr. Bernard's presentations on leading the church with a clear vision helped to clarify the connection between the vision and the functioning of the Church of God of East Flatbush. He also challenged me to staff my vision in a strategic way which gave practical guidance in building the ministry team of my local congregation.

Church of God of East Flatbush Survey

A questionnaire was designed to survey the congregation's perception of the COGEF's acceptance and affirmation of individuals of different races and cultures, and educate them on discrimination. At the end of the research project the survey was conducted again to determine whether perceptions had changed based on several transformational strategies deployed during the course of the project.

The analysis was conducted against a total of 200 randomly selected questionnaires from a total pool of approx. 750 completed questionnaires. A site team member was always present to facilitate the administration of the questionnaire. An independent research company conducted the analysis of the raw data. Each participant was ensured that the survey was anonymous to encourage the integrity of responses from those who volunteered to participate. No coercion was involved. They were asked if they had questions before they began. All their questions were answered and they proceeded to complete the questionnaire. As respondents completed the surveys, they

were collected by the ushers and placed in folders for the researcher. An independent research company Applied Public Policy Research Institute for Study and Evaluation (APPRISE) conducted the analysis.

Pre-project Questionnaire

COGEF administered the first survey at the 11:00 am service on January 14, 2007 and the 8:00 am service on January 28, 2007. A questionnaire was distributed to the congregation at the end of each of these services, and a random sample of completed questionnaires was randomly selected from each of the groups for the analysis. Because the 11:00am service is much larger than the 8:00am service, APPRISE randomly selected 25 surveys from the 8AM service and 75 surveys from the 11 AM service.

Post-project Questionnaire

A post project survey was administered on July 15, 2007. During the course of the 8:00 and 11:00 a.m. worship service, a sample of 100 completed questionnaires was randomly selected for the analysis.

Process of random selection

Only those questionnaires that were considered complete were allowed to be selected for the analysis group. A questionnaire was considered complete if all of the questions were complete with two exceptions. The knowledge based assessment of discrimination terminology questions were not required to be completed, as many respondents, presumably many who were not sure of the correct answers, did not

complete these questions. Additionally, the question that asked respondents to rank the worst thing that would happen if COGEF was not accepting of all races and cultures was not required to be completed. In this question, the survey provided a list of five items and asked respondents to rank these items from 1 to 5. Many respondents left some answers blank or ranked several categories as “1”. Because of the large number of respondents who did not answer this question completely, surveys that did not complete this question were also eligible for inclusion in the analysis.

Validity stats/confidence level

Standard t-tests were used to assess whether differences between groups of respondents and differences between the pre and post survey were statistically significant. Differences were considered to be statistically significant if the confidence level was 90 percent or greater.

Other vital qualitative research methods were employed (i.e., focus group), but this survey was the primary quantitative research instrument for this project. Therefore the questionnaire was extensive in scope and consisted of five categories of questions:

1. Demographics: The demographic section of the questionnaire was extensive, and provided possibilities for over 50 cross-tabulations to determine if there were significant differences in opinions between different segments of the population in sub segments of age, gender, nationality, marital status and education.

2. **Church profile:** (i.e., length of membership, frequency of attendance) also provided additional opportunities to identify sub-segments that self identified in the context of church life.

3. **Perception of Church of God of East Flatbush related to inclusion:** Questions related to this segment were designed to gain feedback to understand the primary question of the study - what are the congregation's views on COGEF's acceptance and affirmation of individuals of different races and cultures. The results of this section in the pre- project evaluation would essentially drive the focus of the transformational process.

4. **Perception of own attitudes related to inclusion.** Two questions were designed to determine the respondent's level of personal identification with the degree of inclusion they assigned to the overall church.

5. **Knowledge of discrimination terminology:** Understanding the importance of education as a strategy early in the project, this question was designed almost as a pre-test to determine the congregation's current level of knowledge as it relates to a fundamental knowledge of key terms related to discrimination and inclusion.

TIMELINE 2007

January

- Pre-test on cultural sensitivity-January 7th
- Sermon & Seminar—Historical Perspective—History of the COG, history of migration of COG to Jamaica, history of COGEF-January 14th & 17th
- Seminar – History of Pentecostalism
- Site Team Meeting Third Thursdays-January 18th
 - Christian Education planning meeting to develop training manual on cross-cultural leadership
- Competencies—Initiate sessions with personal physical trainer-January 22
- Competencies—on-going

February

- Urban Reality Series—Cultural Diversity-February 4th
- Town hall meeting—Discussion on the Jamaican impact on the establishment and ministry praxis of COGEF—February 18th
- Teaching and dialogue session—responding to conflict in the power of Pentecost (Book of Acts)
- Focus group meeting—February 15th
- Develop training manual on cross-cultural leadership—on going
- Site Team Meeting—Third Thursday-February 15, 2007
- Competencies—Family vacation (rest and relaxation) February 19-24
- Competencies—Regular meetings with Pastors and staff to delegate responsibilities—on-going

March

- Urban Reality Series—Create diverse worship experience (i.e., speakers and/or Music and Arts renditions from various cultural back-grounds)
- Workshops on Cross Cultural Relationships—March 4
- Site Team Meeting—March 15
- Develop training manual on cross-cultural leadership—on going
- Competencies—Regular meetings with Pastors and staff to delegate responsibilities –on going
- Fishbowl—March 14th

April

- Urban Reality Series—Create diverse worship experience (i.e., speakers an/or Music and Arts renditions from various cultural backgrounds)
- Workshop on diverse expressions of worship—April 11, 2007
- Celebrating Cultural Diversity-April 29, 2007
- Site Team Meeting –third Thursday
- Develop training manual on cross-cultural leadership—on-going
- Focus group meeting – April 29, 2007
- Fishbowl 2 – April 14 (Included an empty chair)
- Fishbowl 3—Youth and Inclusion – April 18th
- Fishbowl 4—Men's Retreat
- Competencies--Regular meetings with Pastors and staff to delegate responsibilities—on-going

May

- Urban Reality Series-Create diverse worship experience (i.e., speakers and/or Music and Arts renditions from various cultural backgrounds)
- Sociological Seminars Issues of migration and faith—Part 1 & 2—May 2nd & 9th
 - May 2nd-Issues of Migration and Relationship
 - May 9th-Issues of Migration and Faith
- Pentecostal Celebration Revival—Weekend May 25-27
- Site team meeting – Third Thursday – May 17th
- Develop training manual on cross-cultural leadership-on-going
- Competencies—Regular meetings with Pastors and staff to delegate responsibilities-on-going

June

- Urban Reality Series—Create diverse worship experience (i.e., speakers and/or Music and Arts renditions from various cultural backgrounds)
- Complete development of a manual on cross cultural leadership
- Site team meeting—third Thursday, June 21st
- Focus Group—Post Evaluation
- Post-test on cultural Sensitivity-June 10th
- Competencies—Regular meetings with Pastors and staff to delegate responsibilities on going.

Plan of Implementation

Due to the fact that the Church of God of East Flatbush is moving towards its 40th year of existence, it is imperative that we address cultural relevancy in an urban setting. The congregation has experienced steady growth among first generation immigrants. As a result, it remains an oasis of spirituality and culture in terms of ministry model and praxis. The pioneers are swiftly approaching retirement age which brings urgency to the issue of cultural engagement as we seek to cultivate an environment that is greater than a single culture haven to ensure continued existence and relevance. Furthermore, it was the goal to see our local congregation move from just being a loyal congregation to becoming truly Pentecostal in theology and praxis. It was my intention to lead and be led by the congregation in a process of studying the challenges and opportunities for urban ministry and to develop a model which provides room for other cultures within the leadership and congregation of the Church of God of East Flatbush.

The desire was to see the church operate as a culturally relevant community of faith in an urban setting as it relates to the Great commission. This would also include guiding the congregation to intentionally function as a transformative urban ministry where diverse cultures can be celebrated through worship, outreach and leadership. This would also empower individual congregants to initiate, develop and sustain real life interpersonal relationships, even in situations where there is no obvious catalyst for community formation or where conditions of “social” exclusion exist. This would result in individual acts of liberation and community that demonstrates the Great Commission as a way of life.

Data Collection Strategies

As a researcher, I was responsible for establishing a relationship with participants to create safety and trust for the participants to feel non-threatened and maintained an attitude of sensitivity and show respect for boundaries. Another procedure for collecting data was field notes, transcripts from interviews, assigned individuals took notes in various settings, like meetings, town hall meeting, fish bowls, small group meetings, congregational meetings and services. Data was also collected through electronic means like videos and audio taping. Congregants were invited to complete questionnaires.

Limitation of Study

The limitation of the study could be confined to a few issues. Although there was not full participation from the membership, we had a significant response and participation in all our activities. The other limitation of the study was that we did not take into consideration the difference between the first generation Jamaican adult immigrants and their first generation immigrant children. The fishbowl was far more complicated than anticipated. The issue of inclusion was defined differently by different segments of the congregation. For example, youth and men fishbowls uncovered a different definition of inclusion than that verbalized by the women. For example, the youth fishbowl defined the issue of inclusion to extend beyond race and nationality to sexual orientation. Lastly, the study focused on congregational transformation and did not include a tool to monitor individual transformation.

Pushbacks

The congregation appeared exhausted from filling out surveys after each presentation and as a result a decision was made to reduce them. This appeared to be a response to the extensive process of survey completion rather than the workshops themselves. There was also some discomfort with the process of the fishbowl because some members of the fishbowls were challenged directly and indirectly by other members of the congregation who did not share their experience of being excluded. The focus group also expressed a concern that in the process of transformation and inclusion of new members we could lose long standing Jamaican members.

Role of Researcher

My personal hermeneutics as a Black Pentecostal minister compels me to strive towards a renewal of true Pentecostalism which is racially and culturally inclusive and one which serves the poor and those who are marginalized because of class, gender or race. As one who has live and studied outside the Jamaican culture for many years, I have learned to appreciate the wealth of a multicultural community. I believe that culture should be respected but secondary to ones spiritual formation. Although I am Jamaican by birth and American by citizenship, I consider myself a citizen of the world. It is for this reason that I passionately promote cultural diversity within any congregation that has the opportunity to impact a multicultural context.

CHAPTER 6

Introduction

When I arrived in Brooklyn as senior pastor of the Church of God of East Flatbush, I commissioned a community study to gain some insight on the impact of the church ministries. This project was guided by the professional services of Mr. George Gallop Jr., chairman of the George H. Gallop International Institute. When we thought of the evaluation tool (pre and post evaluation) for the Demonstration Project we recognized the benefits of securing a professional company specializing in research to interpret and analyze the data. Various methodologies were utilized to collect data and provide the most practical and efficient methods to address the research questions. We once again sought the advice of George H. Gallop International Institute and they recommended the services of the Applied Public Policy Research Institute for Study and Evaluation (APPRISE). This company was instrumental in guiding us in the creation of the questionnaires as well as helping us to identify trends and interpret data.

Pre and Post-test (Cultural Sensitivity)

The pre-test was important to the study in providing a foundation for comparison. A series of questions were developed to determine the congregation's level of cultural sensitivity as it related to understanding biases and filters of various nationalities and cultures within the congregation. It was also helpful in assessing the congregation's

knowledge and to establish a benchmark against which to measure transformational paradigm shift.

The post-test was administered to evaluate the growth and/or changes that took place after the participants had been exposed to the trainings, workshops, small groups, sermons and Bible studies.

Evaluation Forms

An evaluation form was distributed at the end of each congregational meetings and sermon to determine the level of increased awareness and to invite suggestions to further the mission. The evaluation form provided the opportunity for easy collection and review of data and was categorized for analysis. This tool was chosen because it provided for smooth administration and it was quantifiable for statistical analysis. It also helped to generate general patterns and trends.

Training Manual

A congregational leadership training manual was developed which will be used to train leaders on cultural inclusiveness within our congregation. This manual includes material on cultural diversity, cultural sensitivity and strategies to promote cultural inclusion.

Leadership Profile

It was the intent of the candidate to see at least a 20% representation of non-Jamaicans in the congregational leadership team. The leadership and congregation were trained in cultural sensitivity by Dr. Yoon Jo Lee, professor at Brooklyn College, Dr. Grace Cornish, author and counselor and Dr. Andria Smith, author and social worker. As a result of this project, the congregation elected the most diverse deacons board in the history of the institution. The ministry team was expanded to show a 35% cultural representation of non-first generation Jamaicans.

Focus Group

It was the intention of the candidate to establish a sample group of five different nationalities to participate in the trainings and workshops and provide verbal feedback. We merged the sample group into the focus group because of the fear of redundancy. The focus group met on a bi-weekly basis to discuss the project, the process and the methods of presentations. Their observations and recommendations were documented by a team leader and submitted to the site team and the candidate. They provided invaluable input as they observed not only the presentations but also the congregational response to the presentations.

Comparison with Other Multicultural congregations in Brooklyn

Brooklyn's socio-economic and ethnic diversity contributes to the prevalence of religious organizations throughout the borough. Despite the similarity of offerings, these facilities all have unique cultures and philosophies which attract different types of people. The environment, culture and needs of each locality determine the institution's

population and focus. When seeking a place for worship, individuals are drawn to organizations that have standards that they admire, maintain values that are similar to their own, satisfy a void in their life, enable them to feel encouraged and empowered, and provide guidance for growth. Some of the most prominent religious institutions serving Brooklyn and services they offer are:

I visited the Christian Cultural Center (CCC) which is a congregation of 28,000 and led by founder and CEO Dr. A.R. Bernard. Established in 1978 as CCC, it is one of the largest non-denominational churches in Brooklyn. The sanctuary and conference center, completed in 2000, sit on 6.5 acres of land. Rev. A. R. Bernard, Sr. is founder and pastor. It is one of the tri-state area's largest churches, with plans for continued expansion. It offers practical applications of Christian beliefs and encourages fellowship between individuals despite difference in cultural backgrounds and experiences. The belief is that the people will be able to learn from and appreciate differences. Although it started in this manner, rapid and immense growth has left many community members on the peripheral. As many people travel from afar to attend this "mega-church", diversity once encouraged has segued into a membership directory that is a veritable "Who's Who" list. This has isolated some parts of the community. Although they admire what it represents, they do not believe they can partake and truly belong.

I also visited Greater Allen located in the Jamaica area of Queens, New York, it is one of the oldest and largest religious institutions of African heritage. The Rev. Dr. Floyd H. Flake assumed leadership in 1976. He also serves as president of Wilberforce University in Ohio and was a member of the U.S. Congress for 11 years. Dr. Flake has grown membership to 18,000. It is one of the nation's largest nonprofit organizations and

NYC's second largest African-American employer. One of the primary tenets of the church is to "teach individuals to rely on God and their own resources in order to make a difference in their lives, church and community". GAAME has had a significant impact on its immediate vicinity as well as other areas of NYC.

I visited The Brooklyn Tabernacle (TBT) located in Brooklyn, it occupies a facility seating up to 5,000 people. TBT has a long history in its community. It has been under the leadership of Pastor Jim Cymbala since 1971, growing from less than 30 people in an underserved and neglected neighborhood. He viewed Brooklyn as part of a "forgotten mission field" and made it his duty to cultivate the land. TBT's presence has contributed to the revitalization of the neighborhood, and it has developed strong communal ties. There is a strong belief in the growth, development and empowerment of the people. Recognizing its limitations, TBT felt it was important to increase its reach and planted six churches throughout the NYC area. It also has created missionary outreach to other countries: Peru, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. TBT has implemented strategies similar to COGEF's to make an impact on its environment. Although they have made an effort to reach out to the impoverished communities of Brooklyn, TBT does not have any outreach programs available in the areas of Brooklyn that COGEF believes are still neglected.

Findings

An overview of the results:

Congregational Survey: There were some improvements in these perceptions of the COGEF as it relates to being inclusive between the pre and the post survey. This section discusses the key findings of the survey.

Demographics: The majority of congregants was female, ages 35 to 54, and is Jamaican.

Respondents to the post survey had lower levels of education and were less likely to be married. It is not clear if the lower educational levels indicated on the post survey impacted the results of the knowledge questions.

**Table 5
Education**

	Pre Survey		Post Survey	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than High School	4	4%	20	20%
High School or GED	36	36%	47	47%
Associate's Degree	14	14%	9	9%
Bachelor's Degree	24	24%	9	9%
Master's Degree or Above	22	22%	15	15%

Respondents were asked to report the highest level of education they have attained. Respondents to the post survey had lower levels of education. Table 5 shows that 40 percent of respondents to the pre survey reported that they completed high school or less than high school, compared to 67 percent of respondents to the post survey. This difference is statistically significant at the 99 percent level.

COGEF Participation: Individuals who attend COGEF are likely to be long-time members of the church and to regularly attend services. There were no significant changes between the pre and the post survey.

COGEF Acceptance and Affirmation: Most respondents reported that they felt COGEF is very accepting and open. Respondents to the post survey were significantly less likely to say that COGEF is “Not Always Accepting” or “Never Accepting”. Seven percent of respondents to the pre survey said that COGEF is “Not Always Accepting” or “Never Accepting”, compared to only 2 percent of respondents to the post survey.

COGEF Opportunities: Most respondents said that they have never felt excluded from leadership positions or ministry opportunities at the COGEF. Respondents to the post survey were less likely to report that they perceived they were excluded from leadership positions or ministry opportunities at the COGEF due to financial status. Respondents to the post survey were also less likely to report that certain influential circles of people caused exclusion from leadership positions or ministry opportunities at the COGEF. These differences are statistically significant.

Nine percent of respondents to the pre survey reported that they perceived financial status as a cause for exclusion in the pre survey and only two percent reported that they perceived financial status as a cause for exclusion in the post survey.

Twenty-two percent of respondents to the pre survey and only 13 percent of respondents to the post survey reported that certain influential circles of people were responsible for their exclusion from leadership opportunities or ministry opportunities at the COGEF.

This is significant because in the pre survey while 67 percent said that they never felt excluded. However, for those who have felt excluded were most likely to attribute it to influential circles in the church (22%) or certain influential individuals (20%)

Table 17
What Caused Exclusion from Leadership
Positions or Ministry Opportunities at the COGEF

	Pre Survey		Post Survey	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Did Not Identify a Cause of Exclusion	58	58%	64	64%
Certain Influential Circles of People	22	22%	13	13%
Individuals	20	20%	16	16%
Leadership	11	11%	5	5%
Pastor	3	3%	3	3%
Other	2	2%	5	5%

Respondent Acceptance: Most respondents reported that they are accepting of other genders, races, and cultures. There was no difference between the pre and post survey in this regard.

Consequences of Discrimination: Respondents were most likely to rate “Loss of souls for the Kingdom” as the most concerning consequence of lack of acceptance of people of all races and cultures. This was consistent in both surveys.

Knowledge of Race Theory Terminology: Respondents were not completely informed on the questions of race theory that were addressed in the survey. There was no measurable improvement in knowledge between the pre and the post survey.

However, this lack of difference could be related to lower education levels in the post survey group.

Segmentation Considerations:

Implications for segmentation consideration were based only on analysis from the pre survey. These segmentation findings helped to inform the implementation of the project on all levels as it relates to using education as a strategy in the transformation process (i.e., fishbowls, training, presentations etc.). In the pre-survey the cross-tabulations suggested that specific attention needed to be given to the transformation process as it related to gender and age:

1. Women of Jamaican decent that were more than likely educated and middle class seemed to be presented by the study as the core majority group. The results of the survey were shared in an objective way with all levels of the congregation as a first step in the process. Training was provided that leveraged this information in identifying the resulting “non-core” groups that needed to be intentionally embraced as a part of this effort. Based on feedback in the fishbowl discussions, this helped to give credibility to the transformative work that needed to be done in identifying and embracing “the other” that did not fit this description.
2. Additional efforts were also made to conduct discussions with the men as a sub-segment to engage in dialog (i.e. men’s fish bowl). This was also done in response to their self reported tendency of arriving at new attitudes and beliefs related to race and culture based on their own experiences. The team interpreted these experiences to include personal dialog and maximum opportunities to engage in the process actively.

Gender

1. Women (78%) were more likely to say that their culture is always affirmed than men (55%) are.
2. Men (64%) are more likely than women (38%) to say that their personal experience had the most impact on their attitudes and beliefs about different races and cultures.
3. Those aged 18-34 were less like to give the Church of God of East Flatbush high marks on being inclusive on several levels. This led to the development of targeted youth fish bowls to further explore ideas regarding their perceptions of attitudes and beliefs related to inclusion. These discussions appeared to uncover a different level of expectations. Signals of organizational inclusivity on their terms a culture that embraces less formal dress for worship services and non believers that are clearly homosexual. They acknowledged that the senior leaders of the church speak to the commitment to make the ministry a place where everyone is accepted and can be nurtured. However, they were not convinced that the transformation was complete.

Age

1. Those aged 35 -54 (71%) are more likely than those aged 18-34 (45%) to say that they would describe the COGEF as a church open to all people.
 2. Those aged 35 -54 (79%) are more likely than those aged 18-34 (61%) to say that their culture is always affirmed through the fellowship and worship services at COGEF.
- In one of the final congregational meetings, the entire congregation was divided into different teams, and challenged to reflect on the transformation process outlined in the attached timeline. They were then asked to summarize the chapters of the churches historical past and theological mandate as it relates to Pentecost. As a next step they

were asked to write the future story of where the church would be based on the critical points of reflection from segment groups across gender, age, spiritual profiles, social status and culture.

CHAPTER 7

Introduction

The Doctor of Ministry is a professional degree program which is designed to enhance both the knowledge and practice of ministry. One of the goals of the program is to improve the ministerial competency of the candidate. A part of the site team's responsibility is to assist the candidate in identifying areas of both strength and weaknesses using the Assessment of Candidate Competency as a working guide. I made an effort to invite certain individuals to be a part of the site team because it was important for me that the process was not compromised. I invited individuals who I believed recognized and respected my role as pastor yet were able to be candid in their opinions and who were from varied academic levels but who were accomplished in their fields. There were two males and three females on the team.

The site team and the candidate decided that the two areas of competency that needed development during this process would be in the role of leader and pastor. "Leadership is defined as one who creates an environment in which the gifts of the Spirit may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts, and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the

sensitivity to share resources.”¹⁵⁹ It was agreed that I needed to address the issue of delegation as a leader.

My journey with my site team has been very crucial as we reviewed my personal competences. We all agreed that my work schedule was excessive and that I was attempting to do too much. In fact I recognized that I could very easily be at the office for the entire week and even when I returned home in the evening, I could be spending time before the computer doing ministry preparation.

First Competency Goal

My first goal focused on prioritizing my workload to what is doable and to say NO when it is warranted. While I have attempted to delegate more to my pastors and staff, I recognize my tendency to assign the same assignment to more than one individual out of the fear that I might be led to believe the assignment was being addressed when in fact it was not. This has caused some confusion when some individuals discovered that someone else was also working on a part of the same assignment.

In order to address the issue of delegation, I recognize that I needed to reevaluate my weekly ministry assignments, prioritize the essential assignments and delegate certain responsibilities to other capable leaders. My challenge was to address what was doable and being able to say no when it was warranted. In order to accomplish this goal three strategies were designed.

1. A weekly meeting with my office staff helped me to prioritize my administrative assignments and secure additional support from my administrative staff.

¹⁵⁹ Mentoring, Research and Project Development Seminar. P. 9.

2. A bi-weekly meeting with my associate pastors and ministers became the context where all services were planned and reviewed. A few areas of pastoral oversight were assigned to capable ministers such as outreach and discipleship, membership development and ministry communication. We also secured an emergency line which is covered by the core of Community Service Chaplains who functions on a rotation basis.
3. In order to better manage my weekly schedule and allow time for rest and personal rejuvenation, all appointments were directed through the administrative offices with a clear directive to keep my schedule manageable

Second Competency Goal

The second competency area which was identified was in the area of Pastor. One of the most common images or models of ministerial leadership in both Christian and Jewish traditions is that of the pastor or shepherd.¹⁶⁰ It was agreed that I needed to address the area of self care.

The role of pastor in the 21st Century presents unique challenges as it relates to self awareness and self care. This is in part due to the numerous demanding roles that are imposed on the clergy in and outside of the pulpit. In “Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching” by Ronald J. Allen, we are given a perspective on the evolving model that dictates the expectations of the role of Pastor. Prior to the 1960s, the model required a “scholar-pastor” whose primary work was to reflect on the “meaning of life” in the context of Scripture. The 1960s were the activist years that spoke to the social conscience of those in ministry. Allen then points us to the impact that the managerial

¹⁶⁰ Mentoring, Research and Project Development Seminar, 13.

concepts from the corporate world started to have on leaders of communities of faith in the 1970s. Today's ministers are expected to perform equally well in the role of "CEO, theologian and social activist".¹⁶¹

These expectations are further complicated by the role that Pastors must play in a post-modern era as vision casters. They must also select, train and empower leadership teams that are primarily volunteer staff to carry out the vision. A pastor is expected to do all this while steadily balancing calendars that are filled with request from parishioners in need of counseling to deal with numerous issues, related to family, relationships, careers, finances and Faith. A socially aware pastor is also expected to be involved in community issues and to advocate for the marginalized. In the midst of these unrealistic expectations as Pastor, we are expected to maintain our spiritual, physical and emotional health while nurturing a healthy family life. This project has aided me in identifying personal areas needing attention while simultaneously helping me to identify my pastoral style of ministry.

My strategies were:

1. With the support of my administrative staff, I reduced my days at the office to three working days and reduced my late evenings.
2. I also arranged with my wife to go to the gym at least three times weekly together. This time together has been very invigorating as our social interaction increased.
3. I increased quality time with my wife and children doing family activities.

Apart from my development in the area of leadership and pastor, this demonstration project also helped in my self-awareness. As I focus on ministry revitalization through cultural inclusion I recognized that my preaching was very afro-centric and focused

¹⁶¹ Ronald Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching*. Judson Press Valley Forge, 1984.

greatly on individual and community empowerment. While this approach might serve a minority community it can also reinforce exclusivity. This project has helped to broaden my preaching focus and awareness and rather than building an afro-centric community of faith the goal is to promote cultural and racial reconciliation.

DEFENSE/PRESENTATION

The defense will be presented in a written and oral format to the New York Theological Seminary located at 475 Riverside Drive. My site team will accompany me for the presentation.

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